# THE SERMONS OF SAINT ANTONY OF PADUA

Translated into English by Paul Spilsbury

*from the Critical Latin Edition of the Centro Studi Antoniani, Padova, Italia (1979):*

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### THE SUNDAY SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

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## THE FESTIVAL SERMONS OF ST. ANTHONY

# PREFACE TO THIS TRANSLATION

This translation has been made from the Critical Edition of the Sermons of St Antony Sermones Dominicales et Festivi sancti Antonii Patavini, published by the Centro Studi Antoniani at Padua in 1979. I have prepared it to accompany my study on the technique of 'concordance' employed by St Antony in his exposition of the Scriptures (hence the word '**concordance**' and its related forms have been highlighted throughout in **bold** type). I have done my best to combine accuracy with readability, but I hope accuracy has prevailed when there has been any conflict.

A word about the footnotes and references. St Antony quotes other authors extensively in his work, as the footnotes to the Critical Edition show clearly. However, he does not cite those authors explicitly nearly as often. I have therefore only given references in those cases where he cites someone by name, or makes it clear that he is quoting. Readers who wish to identify all the other sources must go to the Critical Edition.

Scripture has been quoted from the Douai Version. Antony uses the Latin Vulgate, and many of his points are based upon verbal characteristics of his text. The Douai Version, though archaic, is also based on the Vulgate, and keeps close to its latinisms. I have sometimes needed to amend it, where Antony's own interpretation seems to require it. Where he himself paraphrases the text, I have translated more freely.

The Cross Headings in bold type are taken from the table of themes referred to in St Antony's General Prologue, in preference to those inserted by the Editors of the Critical Edition; it seems to me that they give a better idea of how he himself sub-divided his material. In the case of two sermons, those for the first and the third Sundays in Lent, this has meant that I have recombined material that the Editors have divided. Thus the Editorial paragraph numbers (which I have retained for convenience of cross-reference throughout the translation) begin again in the course of those sermons.

As well as the Sunday Sermons, this translation includes the Marian Sermons, (which in the Critical Edition are printed between the twelfth and thirteenth Sundays after Pentecost), and the Festival Sermons. There is no table of themes for the Festival Sermons; consequently the cross-headings are those of the Editors.

NOTE: St Antony frequently refers to the 'Gloss', the *Glossa Ordinaria* and the *Glossa Interlineara*. Where he makes an explicit reference, I have enclosed it in quotation marks; I have not done so, however, for the many passages identified by the Editors but not explicitly noted by Antony. It may be assumed that the references are to the Gloss on the Scriptural text under discussion. I have only included references in the footnotes when Antony cites a specific author, such as Augustine, but the Editors give only a reference to the Gloss.



BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON THE TRANSLATOR:



Fr. Paul Spilsbury was born in Bristol, England, in 1939. From 1958-1969 he was a member of the English Province of the Franciscan Friars Minor (OFM), and was ordained priest in 1965. He studied mathematics and philosophy at the University of Nottingham from 1966-1971. From 1972 he was a parish priest in the Church of England, but left parish ministry in 1995. He was awarded a Doctorate in Philosophy by the University of Bristol in 1999 for his research into the writings of St Antony of Padua. His Doctoral dissertation is entitled "The Concordance of Scripture: The homiletic and exegetical methods of St Antony of Padua". He is married, with three sons and two daughters. For a Scholarly Study of the

Sermons of St. Antony:

The Concordance of Scripture:
The homiletic and exegetical methods of St Antony of Padua
*A Dissertation by the Rev. Paul Spilsbury*

ABBREVIATIONS

I) Biblical

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Gen Genesis | Wisd Wisdom | Mt Matthew |
| Ex Exodus | Ecclus Ecclesiasticus | Mk Mark |
| Lev Leviticus | Is Isaiah (Isaias) | Lk Luke |
| Num Numbers | Jer Jeremiah (Jeremias) | Jn John |
| Dt Deuteronomy | Lam Lamentations | Ac Acts of the Apostles |
| Jos Joshua (Josue) | Bar Baruch | Rom Romans |
| Jdg Judges | Ezek Ezekiel (Ezechiel) | 1Cor I Corinthians |
| Ruth Ruth | Dan Daniel | 2Cor II Corinthians |
| 1(Sm)Kg I Samuel (I Kings) | Hos Hosea (Osee) | Gal Galatians |
| 2(Sm)Kg II Samuel (II Kings) | Joel Joel | Eph Ephesians |
| 3(1)Kg I Kings (III Kings) | Am Amos | Phil Philippians |
| 4(2)Kg II Kings (IV Kings) | Ob Obadiah (Abdias) | Col Colossians |
| 1Chr I Chronicles (Paralipomenon) | Jon Jonah (Jonas) | 1Thess I Thessalonians |
| 2Chr II Chronicles (Paralipomenon) | Mic Micah (Micheas) | 2Thess II Thessalonians |
| | Nah Nahum | 1Tim I Timothy |

Ez  Ezra (I Esdras)

Neh  Nehemiah (II Esdras)

Tob  Tobit (Tobias)

Jud  Judith

Esth  Esther

Job  Job

Ps  Psalms (Vulgate numbering)

Prov  Proverbs

Eccles  Ecclesiastes

Cant  Canticles (Song of Songs)

Hab  Habbakuk (Habacuc)

Zeph  Zephaniah (Sophonias)

Hag  Haggai (Aggaeus)

Zech  Zechariah (Zacharias)

Mal  Malachi  (Malachias)

1Mac  I Maccabees (Machabees)

2Mac  II Maccabees (Machabees)

2Tim  II Timothy

Tit  Titus

Philem  Philemon

Heb  Hebrews

Jas  James

1Pt  I Peter

2Pt  II Peter

1Jn  I John

2Jn  II John

3Jn  III John

Jude  Jude

Apoc  Revelation (Apocalypse)

2) Non-Biblical

PL  *Patrologia Latina*

# ST. ANTONY'S GENERAL PROLOGUE

1. According to the First Book of Chronicles,

*David gave the purest gold: to make the likeness of the chariot of the cherubims, spreading their wings and veiling the ark of the covenant of the Lord*. [1 Chron 28.18]

2. Genesis speaks of

*The land of Hevilath, where gold groweth, and the gold of that land is very good.* [Gen 2.11-12]

The name Hevilath is supposed to mean 'bringing forth'. It stands for Holy Scripture, which is

*The earth [which] of itself bringeth forth fruit,*

*first the blade, then the ear,*

*afterwards the full corn in the ear.*[Mk 4.28]

By the blade we understand the allegorical sense of Scripture, which builds up faith in accordance with the words:

*Let the earth bring forth the green [growing] herb*. [Gen 1.11]

By the ear we understand the moral sense, which gives form to our behaviour and pierces the mind with its sweetness; and by the full grain is represented the anagogical sense, which treats of the fulness of joy and of angelic blessedness.

So, in the land of Hevilath is found the finest gold, because from the text of the divine page we mine holy understanding. Just as gold is superior to other metals, so understanding is better than mere knowledge. A person who has no understanding of the deeper meaning of Scripture does not grasp even the literal sense properly.

3. Some scholars say that the name David means 'merciful', others that it means 'strong-armed', or else 'desirable in appearance'. David, then, stands for the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was merciful in his Incarnation, strong-armed in his Passion, and who will be desirable for us to behold in eternal blessedness.

He is merciful in pouring out grace, even upon beginners. Mercy irrigates the heart. So it says in Ecclesiasticus:

*I will water my garden of plants,*

*and I will water abundantly the fruits of my bringing-forth*. [Ecclus 24.42]

The garden is the soul, in which Christ, like a gardener, plants the sacraments of the faith, and which he then waters when he makes it fertile with the grace of repentance. Our soul is called the fruit of the Lord's bringing-forth, that is, of his suffering. This is because, like a woman giving birth, he brought it forth in the agony of his Passion.

*offering up with a strong cry and tears,* [Heb 5.7]

as the Apostle says; and in Isaiah:

*Shall not I, that make others to bring forth children, myself bring forth, saith the Lord?* [Is 66.9]

He soaks the fruit of his bringing-forth when, with the myrrh and aloes of his Passion, he mortifies the delights of the flesh, so that the soul, like one drunk, may forget worldly things:

*Thou hast visited the earth and inebriated it.* [Ps 64.10]

He is strong-armed when he carries souls onward from strength to strength, especially those who are making progress in the faith. So it is said in Isaiah:

*I am the Lord thy God, who take thee by the hand,*

*and say to thee: Fear not, for I have helped thee.* [Is 41.13]

Just as a loving mother of a little child, when he wants to climb the stairs, takes his hand in hers so that he can climb after her, so the Lord takes the hand of the humble penitent with the hand of love, that he may climb by the ladder of the cross to the state of perfection, so as to become worthy to see him who is desirable in appearance,

*the King in his beauty...*

*on whom the angels desire to look.* [Is 33.17; 1Pet 1.12]

And so our David, the Son of God, *a merciful and gracious Lord... who giveth abundantly and upbraideth not* [Ps 110.4; Jas 1.5], has given gold, that is the holy understanding of divine Scripture:

*He opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures*. [Lk 24.45]

the purest gold, that is, purified from every scrap of dirt, from every defilement of heretical perversity.

4. There follows:

*To make the likeness of the chariot of the cherubims*.

which means the fulness of knowledge, and which stands for the Old and New

Testaments, in which is the fulness of knowledge, the only knowledge worthy of the name, that makes men knowledgeable; the key-texts of which are as it were wings, which are spread out precisely when they are expounded in the three-fold way referred to above; and so they 'veil the ark of the Lord's covenant.' It is called an 'ark' from the Latin *arcere*, to shut off (from sight), or to keep safe (from a thief). The ark is the faithful soul which should conceal from itself the sight of pride, Leviathan, who according to Job:

> *beholdeth every high thing; He is king over all the children of pride*. [Job 41.25]

and which should keep itself safe from the thief whose holiness is a pretence, who belongs to the darkness of the night, and who is referred to in the Psalm as:

> *the business that walketh about in the dark.* [Ps 90.6]

This ark is called 'of the Lord's covenant' because it initiates an eternal covenant with the Lord in Baptism, namely to renounce the Devil and his pomps:

> *I have sworn; and am determined to keep it.* [Ps 118.106]

This ark is veiled by the wings of the cherubim when it is protected and defended by the preaching of both the New and the Old Testaments from the heat of worldly prosperity, from the rain of carnal desire, and from the thunder of diabolic temptation.

5. And so we have made this 'chariot-throne' to the honour of God, to the building up of souls, and to the comfort of reader and listener; from the understanding of Holy Scripture and from the authorities of either Testament, so that in it, with Elijah, the soul may be lifted up from earthly things and borne away into the heaven of celestial conversation. And note that as on a chariot there are four wheels, so in this work four matters are dealt with, namely: the Lord's Gospels, the history of the Old Testament as it is read in Church, the Introit, and the Epistle of the Sunday Mass. I have collected together and **concorded** each of these, as divine grace has granted and as far as my slender and paltry knowledge allows, following the reapers with Ruth the Moabitess, to gather the fallen ears in the field of Boaz, with fear and modesty as one inadequate for so great and important a burden; yet conquered by the prayers and love of brothers who have constrained me to it. And so that the reader's mind may not be confused by the multiplicity of the material, and the variety of the **concordances**, and forget it all, we have divided the Gospels into clauses, as God has inspired, and **concorded** each with the parts of each history and Epistle. We have expounded the Gospels and histories rather more fully, and the Introits and Epistles in a briefer and more summary way, so that over-wordiness may not give rise to boredom. It is very hard to cover a complicated subject in a brief and useful sermon.

Nowadays, preachers and congregations are so shallow that if a sermon is not full of polished and studied phrases, and a dash of novelty, they are too critical to take any notice of it. So in order that the word of the Lord should come to them in a way they will

not disdain or scorn, to the peril of their souls, I have prefaced each gospel with a suitable prologue, and included in the work itself illustrations drawn from physics and natural history, and explanations of the meanings of words, expounded from the standpoint of morality. I have brought together in one place the headings of all the texts quoted, from which the theme for a sermon may be readily gathered; and I have noted beforehand, at the beginning of the book, the places in which they are to be found, and whatever things are appropriate to the matter.

And so to the Son of God, the Origin of all creation, in whom alone we set and look for the reward of this work, be all praise, all glory and all honour; who is praised and glorious, the blessed God through endless ages. Let the whole Church say: Amen. Alleluia.

# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## SEPTUAGESIMA

**(First, the Gospel for Septuagesima: *The kingdom of heaven is like to a householder*, which is divided into two clauses. The Introit of the Mass: *They have surrounded me*. The Epistle*: Know you not that they that run in the stadium*. The History: *In the beginning God created heaven and earth*.)**

**(In the first clause of this Gospel you will find at least these themes for sermons or principles for preaching:)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for forming the heart of a sinner and on the property of a tile: *Take thee a tile*.)**

1. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*. [Gen 1.1]

The Holy Spirit says to Ezekiel, that is, to the preacher:

*And thou, O son of man, take thee a tile, and draw upon it the plan of the city of Jerusalem*. [Ezek 4.11]

A tile represents the heart of a sinner because of four characteristics which it has: it is moulded between two boards, it is flattened out, it is hardened by fire, and it is made red.

The heart of a sinner should be moulded between the two boards of the Old and New Testaments; for as the Psalmist says:

*Between the midst of the hills the waters shall pass,* [Ps 103.101]

meaning that the waters of doctrine flow from the two Testaments. The word ‘moulded’ is appropriate, because the sinner who has become mis-shapen by sin receives a new shape from the preaching of the two Testaments.

Again, the heart is in a certain sense flattened out. The breadth of charity widens the narrow heart of the sinner. We may recall the words:

*Thy commandment is exceeding broad,* [Ps 118.96]

and "Charity is wider than the ocean."

Then again it is made hard by fire, for the fickle and unstable mind is hardened by the fire of tribulation, lest it run away in the love of temporal things. Solomon says that what a furnace does to gold, what a file does to iron, what a flail does to grain: that tribulation does to the just man [cf. Wisd 3.6].

Finally, it is made red; by which is indicated the boldness of holy zeal, of which it is said:

*The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up,* [Ps 68.10]

and:

*With zeal I have been zealous for the house of Israel*. [1 Kg 19.10]

The house represents the Church or the faithful soul.

So there are these four things to be learnt from the tile:

a) the knowledge of each Testament for the instruction of one's neighbour;

b) an abundance of charity to love him;

c) patience in tribulation to suffer insults for Christ;

d) steadfast zeal to bear every evil.

So, *take thee a tile and draw on it the City of Jerusalem*.

2. Note that the spiritual Jerusalem is threefold: first the Church Militant, second the faithful soul, third the heavenly homeland. In the Lord's name, then, I will take a tile- the heart of anyone who will listen- and I will inscribe upon it the threefold City, namely, the articles of the Church's faith, the virtues of the soul, and the reward of our heavenly homeland. I will comment on texts from each Testament, and expound them under seven headings.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the seven articles of faith: The first day, God said: *Be light made*.)**

3. *In the beginning God created heaven and earth*.

These words refer to that which contains and that which is contained. God the Father created, and he re-creates, ‘in the Beginning’ (that is, in the Son). He created in six days, resting on the seventh; he creates anew in six articles of faith, promising eternal rest on the seventh.

On the first day God said:

*Be light made. And light was made.* [Gen 1.6]

The first article of faith is the Nativity.

On the second day God said:

*Let there be a firmament made amidst the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters*. [Gen 1.6]

The second article of faith is Baptism

On the third day God said:

*Let the earth bring forth the green herb, and such as may seed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after its kind*. [Gen 1.11]

The third article is the Passion.

On the fourth day God said:

*Let there be two great lights in the firmament*. [cf. Gen 1.14]

The fourth article is the Resurrection.

On the fifth day God made the birds of the air [cf. Gen 1.20]. The fifth article is the Ascension.

On the sixth day God said:

*Let us make man to our image and likeness... And he breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul*. [Gen 1.26; .2.7]

The sixth article is the sending of the Holy Spirit.

On the seventh day God rested from all the work which he had done [cf. Gen 2.2]. The

seventh article is the coming to judgement, in which we shall rest from all our works and labours.

Let us call upon the Holy Spirit, who is Love, the bond between the Father and the Son. May he grant us so to be united with each of these seven days and articles, and in accord with them, that it may avail for his honour and the building-up of his Church.

**(A sermon on the Nativity of the Lord: *The first day, God said: Be light made*.)**

4. On the first day God said, *Be light made*.

This light is the Wisdom of God the Father, enlightening every man coming into this world [cf. Jn 1.9], and dwelling in inaccessible light [cf. 1Tim 6.16]; concerning which the Apostle writes to the Hebrews:

*Who is the brightness and image of his substance*; [Heb 1.3]

and of which the Prophet says:

*In thy light we shall see light*; [Ps 35.10]

and in the Book of Wisdom:

*Wisdom is the brightness of the eternal light*. [Wisd 7.26]

It is of this, then, that the Father says: *Be light made. And light was made*, which John interprets more clearly when he says:

*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*. [Jn 1.14]

Ezekiel too, in like sense but in different words, says:

*The hand of God was laid upon me*, [Ezek 3.22]

that is to say the Son, in whom and through whom all things were made. The light, then, which was inaccessible and invisible was made visible in the flesh*, to enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death* [cf. Lk 1.79].

Regarding this enlightenment, we have the passage in John where Jesus *spat on the ground and made clay and anointed the eyes of the man born blind*. [cf. Jn 9.61]

The spittle, coming from the head of the Father, signifies Wisdom, since *the head of Christ is God* [1Cor 11.3]. As the spittle is joined to dust, so divinity is joined to humanity,

that the eyes of the man born blind may be enlightened- that is, the eyes of the human race which was blinded in our first parent. We see clearly then that on the very same day, the Lord's day, that *God said: Let there be light*, the Wisdom of God the Father was born of the Virgin Mary and *scattered the darkness which was upon the face of the deep* [cf. Gen 1.2], that is of the human heart. Wherefore upon that very day we sing in the Dawn Mass: *Light has shone* [Is 9.21], and in the Gospel: *A light from heaven shone about the shepherds* [cf. Lk 2.9].

**(A sermon on Baptism and those who violate it: *Let there be a firmament*.)**

5. On the second day God said: *Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.* The firmament in the midst of the waters is Baptism, separating the upper waters from the lower waters; that is to say, separating the faithful from the unfaithful, who are rightly called 'lower waters' because they seek the things that are below and daily fall short by their defects. 'The waters above', however, stand for the faithful who, according to the Apostle, should *seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God*. [Col 3.1]

Note too that we refer to 'crystal' waters. A crystal, when it is touched by the rays of the sun, emits brilliant sparks. Likewise the faithful man, enlightened by the rays of the sun, should give forth sparks of true preaching and of good works, to set his neighbour on fire. But alas, alas! When the firmament is cracked the waters flow to waste in the dead sea, and they flow in with what is dead. So Ezekiel says:

*These waters that issue forth from the mound of sand to the east, go down to the plains of the desert, and shall enter the sea*. [Ezek 47.8]

The mound stands for contemplation, in which as in a tomb the dead are buried and hidden. The contemplative, being dead to the world and hidden from the hurly-burly of men, is as it were buried. And so Job says:

*Thou shalt enter into the grave in abundance, as a heap of wheat is brought in its season*. [Job 5.26]

The just man enters the grave of the contemplative life in the abundance of the grace conferred upon him, just as a heap of grain is carried into the barn at harvest-time. The chaff of temporal things has been winnowed away, and his mind rests in the barn of heavenly fulness. Being at rest, it is filled with the sweetness of heaven.

6. Note too that the mound is said to be *of sand to the east*. By the sand, penance is indicated. So you find in Exodus that Moses *hid the Egyptian he had slain in the sand* [Ex 2.12], because the just man ought to strike down mortal sin in confession, and hide it with the satisfaction of penance; and that penance should always look towards that East of which Zacharias speaks:

*Behold a man, the Orient is his name*. [Zech 6.12]

We read, then, of *those waters which issue forth from the mound of sand towards the east*. Alas! How much water, and how many religious, issue forth from the mound of the contemplative life, from the sand of penance, from the east of grace! They issue forth, I say, with Dinah and Esau from their father's house [cf. Gen 34.1; 28.9], that is they go out with the devil and with Cain from the face of God, and with Judas the traitor, who held the purse, from the school of Christ. They go down to the level of the desert, to the plain of the wilderness of Jericho, in which, as Jeremiah tells, Zedekiah was blinded by Nebuchadnezzar (the devil) in the full extent of his temporal possessions (the sinner is deprived of the light of reason); and his own sons (his works) were slain by the devil. In this plain Cain (whose name means 'possession') killed Abel (whose name means 'struggle'). The possession of transitory abundance kills the struggle of penance. And so the waters go down to the level of the desert; wherefore it is said in Genesis:

*When they went forth from the east into the west, they found a plain in the land of Sennaar*. [cf. Gen 11.2]

The sons of Adam go forth from the east of grace into the west of sin, and when they have found the plain of worldly pleasure they dwell in the land of Sennaar (which means 'a stench'). In the stench of gluttony and lust they build a house in which to dwell, not like christians but like pagans who take the name of their God in vain. The Lord says in Exodus:

*Thou shalt not take the name of thy God in vain*. [Ex 20.7]

He who uses the name of God without its meaning, instead of respecting the meaning of the name, takes it in vain. And so they enter the sea, which is the bitterness of sin, in order to pass from this to the bitterness of torment. God made the firmament of Baptism in the midst of the waters, to divide the waters from the waters; but these sinners, as Isaiah says,

*have transgressed the laws, they have changed the ordinance, they have broken the everlasting covenant.*

*Therefore shall a curse devour the earth; and the inhabitants thereof shall sin,*

*and therefore they that dwell therein shall grow mad*. [Is 25.5-6]

The written law and the law of grace are transgressed, because they are not willing to keep the written law like slaves, or the law of grace like sons. They alter the natural law, which is: "Whatever you do not want done to you, do not do to others." They break the everlasting covenant which they made in Baptism. Therefore the curse of pride shall devour the earth (that is, earthly folk), and those who dwell in it shall sin with the sin of avarice, those to whom is said in the Apocalypse*, Woe to you who dwell upon the earth*;

and those who cultivate it shall grow mad with the sin of lust, which is weakness and derangement of mind.

**(A sermon on the Passion of Christ and the faith of the Church: *Let the earth bring forth*, etc.)**

7. On the third day God said: *Let the earth bring forth the green herb*. The earth or ground (which derives its name from the word 'grind') is the body of Christ, which according to Isaiah was *ground down for our sins* [cf. Is 53.5]. This ground was dug and ploughed with the nails and the spear. As someone has said, "The earth when it has been dug will give its fruits in due season. The flesh of Christ when dug gave heavenly kingdoms." It brought forth the growing herb in the Apostles, it made the seed of preaching in the martyrs, and the fruit tree bearing fruit in the confessors and virgins. In the primitive Church faith was like a tender plant, so that the Apostles might have said, in the words of Canticles, *Our sister* (the infant Church) *is little* (in the number of the faithful), *and has no breasts* (wherewith she may nourish her children) [cf. Cant 8.8]. She had not yet been made pregnant by the Holy Spirit, and so they said, *What shall we do with our sister on the day* (of Pentecost) *when she is to be spoken to* (by the speaking of the Holy Spirit)? Concerning this, the Lord said in the Gospel:

*He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind*, [Jn 14.26]

(that is, he will supply assistance).

8. On the fourth day God said: *Let there be two lights in the firmament*. In the firmament which is Christ, now glorified through the Resurrection, there are two lights- namely the brightness of the Resurrection, which is signified by the sun, and the incorruptibility of the flesh, which is signified by the moon. This refers to the state of the sun and moon before our first parent's fall. After his disobedience all creatures suffer some loss. That is why the Apostle says:

*Every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain, even till now*. [Rom 8.22]

9. On the fifth day God made the birds in the sky, to which there appropriately corresponds the fifth article of faith, the Ascension. In the Ascension the Son of God flew like a bird up to the right hand of the Father, with the flesh he had assumed. So he himself says in Isaiah:

*who call a bird from the east, and from a far country the man of my own will*. [Is 46.11]

'Calling from the east' refers to the Mount of Olives, which is to the east of Jerusalem. Of this it is said:

*He ascends upon the heaven of heavens*, [Ps 67.34]

that is, to equality with the Father. The ‘bird’ is ‘my Son’, and ‘from a far country’ (the world) comes ‘the man of my will’, he who said:

*My meat is to do the will of my Father who sent me*. [Jn 4.34]

10. On the sixth day God said: *Let us make man*, and the sixth article of faith is the sending of the Holy Spirit. In this mystery the image of God which had been deformed and defiled in man is re-formed and enlightened by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who

*breathed into the face of man the breath of life*. [Gen 2.7]

As it is said in the Acts of the Apostles:

*And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a mighty wind coming. [Acts 2.2]*

Note that the Holy Spirit is well called ‘mighty’, since he takes away eternal woe and bears the mind above. Hence David the prophet says:

*The light of thy countenance is signed upon us, O Lord*. [Ps 4.7]

The countenance of the Father is the Son; just as someone is recognised by their countenance, so the Father is recognised through the Son. The light of the countenance of God is therefore knowledge of the Son and the enlightening of faith, which was stamped and impressed upon the hearts of the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, like a seal, and thus *man was made a living soul*.

11. On the seventh day God rested from all his works. Even so the Church rests in the seventh article of faith from all her labour and sweat. Then *God shall wipe every tear from her eyes* [Apoc 21.4], that is to say, every cause of weeping. Then she will be praised by her Spouse, and be found worthy to hear the words:

*Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates*, [Prov 31.31]

the gates, that is, of judgements. Then she together with her children shall hear the still small voice, *Come, ye blessed*.

In these seven days and seven articles, described briefly and in passing, we approach the task of expounding the six virtues of the faithful soul, which are the moral significance of the six hours referred to in the Gospel reading; together with the meaning of the penny and of the sabbath.

So, dear brothers, let us ask the Word of the Father, the first principle of all creation, that in the seven days of this life, while we are living according to the body, we may live

according to the soul in the seven articles of faith; by which we may be found worthy to come to him who is the life, and the sabbath rest, and the reward of the saints; by him who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

**(On the second clause. In the second clause of the Gospel, first a sermon on contrition of heart for penitents: *God said: Be light made, and light was made*.)**

12. We will now treat in more detail the things of Jerusalem, that is to say of the faithful soul, which in Matthew is called a vineyard, inasmuch as it has to be dug around with the hoe of contrition, pruned with the sickle of confession, and supported by the stakes of satisfaction.

*God said, Be light made. And light was made*. Just as Ezekiel speaks of *a wheel within a wheel* [cf. Ezek 1.16], so is the New Testament within the Old; and just as curtain is coupled to curtain [cf. Ex 26.3], so the New explains the Old. In this way let us **concord** the New Testament with the Old, as we explain the moral sense of the six hours of the Gospel reading in terms of the six days of creation.

13. On the first day, then, *God said, Be light made. And light was made*. Hear how this is **concordant** with the first hour:

*The kingdom of heaven is like to an householder, who went out early in the morning*. [Matt 20.1]

Note that there are six virtues of the soul, namely: contrition of heart, confession by the mouth, satisfaction in works, love of God and neighbour, the exercise of the active and contemplative life, and the completion of final perseverance. When the darkness of mortal sin is ‘upon the face of the deep’ (that is, of the heart), man suffers ignorance as regards knowledge of God, and as regards his own frailty; and he does not know how to distinguish between good and evil. This is that three day period spoken of in Exodus, when

*for three days there was a darkness that could be felt in the land of Egypt; but where the children of Israel were there was light*. [cf. Ex 10.21-23]

The three days are: the knowledge of God, the knowledge of oneself, and the ability to distinguish good and evil. St Augustine[1] prays like this for the first two: "Lord, grant that I may know you and myself." Genesis speaks of the third in the text:

*The tree of good and evil was in paradise*, [cf. Gen 2.9]

that is, the ability to distinguish between good and evil was in the mind of man.

The first day enlightens us to know the dignity of our soul; whence Ecclesiasticus says:

*Keep thy soul in meekness and give it honour*. [Ecclus 10.31]

But wretched man,

*when he was in honour, did not understand;*

*he was made like the senseless beasts*. [Ps 48.13]

The second day enlightens us to know our own weakness, whence Micah says:

*Thy humiliation shall be in the midst of thee*. [Mic 6.14]

Our ‘midst’ is our belly, the place where excrement is produced. In considering what defiles us our pride is humbled, our arrogance is trodden down, and our conceit is blown away.

The third day enlightens us to distinguish between day and night, between disease and wholeness, between what is clean and what is unclean. We have great need of this ability, for, as has been said,[2] "What is evil is neighbour to what is good, and can be mistaken for it. Virtue has often been punished, instead of vice."

In these three days there is truly a darkness that can be felt in the land of Egypt, and upon the face of the deep; but wherever the true children of Israel are, there is light, the light of which God said *Be light made*. This is the light of contrition of heart, enlightening the soul, the light which shows the knowledge of God, the awareness of our own weakness and the distinction between good and evil in man.

14. This is the first morning and the first hour, when the householder (that is, the penitent) goes forth to hire labourers to work in his vineyard, as the Gospel for this Sunday relates. In the Introit of the Mass we sing, *The sorrows of death came about me*, and the Epistle read is that of the blessed Paul to the Corinthians: *Know ye not that those who run in the stadium*, etc. Of this morning the Psalmist says:

*In the morning I will stand before you*. [Ps 5.5]

that is, in the beginning of grace I shall stand as true and upright as you made me to be. For, as St Augustine[3] says, "God, who is true and upright, made man to be true and upright, so that only the soles of his feet should touch the ground; in other words, so that he might seek from the earth only those things that are necessary." Of this morning it is said in Mark:

*And very early on the first day after the sabbath they came to the tomb, the sun being already risen*. [Mk 16.2]

Note that it is well-called ‘the first day after the sabbath’, because no-one can come to the tomb (that is, to the consideration of his death), unless he first rests from the care of temporal things. As the Psalmist says:

*In the morning I put to death all the wicked in the land*. [Ps 100.8]

(that is, in contrition I put down all the movements of my flesh). The Bridegroom says of the penitent soul:

*Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising?* [Cant 6.9]

15. As the dawn is the beginning of day and the end of night, so contrition is the end of sin and the beginning of repentance. And so the Apostle says:

*You were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord*; [Eph 5.8]

and again:

*The night is passed and day is at hand*. [Rom 13.12]

So at first light and early in the morning the householder goes out to tend the vineyard, of which Isaiah says:

*A vineyard was made for the beloved in the horn of a son of oil.*

*He fenced it around, and took out stones from it;*

*and he built a tower in the midst of it, and made a winepress in it,*

*and planted a choice vine*. [Is 5.1-2]

The vineyard is the soul. It is made for the beloved, that is, for the honour of the beloved. ‘In a horn’ means ‘in the strength of the Passion’. The Beloved is ‘a son of oil’, that is to say, of mercy; for only by mercy, *and not by the works of justice which we have done* [Tit 3.5], did he make that vineyard safe; which he fenced round with the hedge of the written law and the law of grace. Solomon speaks of this in Proverbs:

*He that breaketh down a hedge, a serpent shall bite him*, [Eccles 10.8]

meaning that he who destroys the law will be bitten by the devil, who ‘cultivates shadows’ (that is, sinners). And so Job says:

*He sleepeth under the shade, he rests in the covert of the reed, and in moist places*. [Job 40.16]

That is, with overcast mind he rests in the deceit of the hypocrite and in extravagance.

There follows: *And he removed stones from it* (the hardness of sin); *he built a tower in the midst of it* (humility, or else the superior part of reason); and set up the winepress of contrition, from which is pressed out the wine of tears; and so, by the examples and teachings of the saints, he planted a choice vine where at early morn the householder may bring the labourers (that is, the love and fear of God) who will tend it well.

**(A sermon for penitents: *Saul came in*.)**

16. Concerning this morn we read that:

*Saul came into the midst of the camp of the sons of Ammon in the morning watch, and he slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day*. [cf. 1 Sam 11.11]

Saul stands for penitence, having been anointed with the oil of grace; 'at the morning watch' (contrition of heart) he must enter the midst of the camp of the sons of Ammon (Ammon means 'paternal water', and stands for the movements of the flesh which from our first parent flow into us like running water). These Saul must strike down until the heat of the day, that is, until the fervour of grace irradiates the mind and warms it by its radiation.

**(A sermon against the rich: *The Lord prepared a worm*.)**

Again, concerning this morn you find in the prophet Jonah that

*The Lord prepared a worm when the morning arose, and it struck the ivy and it withered*. [Jon 4.7]

Ivy cannot raise itself up by itself. It seeks a higher position by clinging to the branches of another tree, and so stands for the man rich in the wealth of this world, who is lifted up to heaven not by himself but by the alms he gives to the poor, as it were clinging to the branches. And so our Lord says in the Gospel:

*Make you friends of the mammon of iniquity* [that is, of in-equity] *that when you shall fail they may receive you*. [Lk 16.9]

As the morning arises, the ivy is struck and cut down by the teeth of a worm; that is, at the rising of grace or of contrition of heart the penitent experiences the gnawing of conscience. Then, as the ivy falls to the ground, so the penitent regards himself as earth, becoming in his own eyes dried up and worthless, and saying with the Psalmist:

*My flesh and my heart hath fainted away*; [Ps 72.26]

that is, the pride of my heart and my carnal nature.

Having dealt with these matters of the first day and the early morning of contrition, we now pass to the second day and the third hour of confession.

**(A sermon for those confessing: *Let there be a firmament*.)**

17. On the second day God said: *Let a firmament be made in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters*. The firmament is confession, which firmly binds a man so that he does not slip into dissipation. The Lord reproves the sinful soul which lacks this firmament, through Jeremiah:

*How long wilt thou be dissolute in deliciousness, O wandering daughter?* [Jer 31.22]

and through Isaiah:

*Pass thy land as a river, O daughter of the sea; for thou hast a girdle no more*. [Is 23.10]

The wretched soul is called ‘daughter of the sea’, sucking the pleasure of the world as from the devil’s breast: sweet-tasting but giving rise to eternal bitterness. So James says:

*When concupiscence hath conceived it bringeth forth sin; but sin when it is completed begetteth death*. [Jas 1.15]

This is the point of the words, *Pass thy land as a river*. It is as if to say: Gird yourself with the girdle of confession and hitch up your garments, lest they drag in the dirt. Do not try to cross upon the bridge of earthly wealth; on it many have been endangered. Cross rather by the scarcity and narrowness of poverty, for a narrow stream is crossed in security of soul. But ‘there is no girdle’ for the sinful soul, meaning that there is not the firm ground of confession. Hence the words, *Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters*. The waters above are the flowings of grace; the waters below are the flowings of concupiscence, which a man ought to thrust beneath him.

Alternatively, the mind of the just man possesses ‘waters above’, that is to say, reason which is the superior power of the soul, and which always urges man to good. The ‘waters below’, on the other hand, namely sensuality, always tend to drag him down. So the firmament of confession divides the upper waters from the lower, so that whoever confesses goes out of Sodom and up into the hills, not looking back like Lot’s wife who was turned into a statue or pillar of salt [cf. Gen 19.17,26]. The animals (that is, the demons) eagerly consume that pillar by licking. When the just man goes out from Egypt

with the true Israelites, journeying to the land of promise, he does not set up his own guide (that is to say, his own will) to lead him back to the fleshpots, peppers and pickles of the Egyptians (the desire for carnal things).

I pray then that there may be a firmament in the midst of the waters. Then, when the penitent has given his confessor the assurance of a firm purpose not to fall back, he will deserve, in the very act of confessing, to be inebriated with the new wine of the Holy Spirit, like the Apostles at the third hour. Made new by confession, he will be filled like a bottle with new wine. For as the Lord says:

*If the new wine is put into an old bottle, the bottle will be broken and the wine spilt*. [cf. Lk 5.37]

The new wine is the Holy Spirit, the old bottle is the former sinful life. That is what happened to the unrepentant traitor Judas, who was hung by the neck like a bottle and burst in the midst of his belly, so that his bowels, which had drunk dry the poison of avarice, were spilt upon the ground [cf. Acts 1.18].

Confession is well named ‘the third hour’, because whoever makes a true confession is like a householder cultivating the vineyard of his soul. In three things he should confess himself blameworthy, namely, that he has offended God, killed himself, and been a stumbling-block to his neighbour. He has done this by not showing due justice to each: honour to God, care for himself, and love for his neighbour. Well may he complain, in the Introit of today’s Mass, *The pangs of death have encompassed me* (because he has offended God), *the pains of hell have surrounded me* (because he has fallen into mortal sin), *and in my tribulation* (whereby he is troubled because he has scandalised his neighbour) *I cried to the Lord* (with contrition of heart); *and from his holy temple* (Christ’s humanity, in which his divinity dwells) *he heard my voice* (that is, the voice of the penitent’s confession).

**(A sermon for penitents or enclosed religious: *Who hath sent out the wild ass*.)**

18. On the third day God said:

*Let the earth bring forth the green herb, and such as yieldeth seed according to its kind, having seed each one according to its kind upon the earth*.

Note that by the third day is denoted the satisfaction of penance, which comprises three forms: prayer, fasting and almsgiving, which are signified by the three aforementioned things.

It is written, then, *Let the earth bring forth the herb*. The herb that grows signifies prayer; whence Job says of the penitent:

*Who hath sent out the wild ass free?*

*and who hath loosed his bonds?*

*To whom I have given a house in the wilderness,*

*and his dwelling in the barren lands.*

*He scorneth the multitude of the city,*

*and heareth not the cry of the driver.*

*He looketh round about the mountains of his pasture,*

*and seeketh for every green thing*. [Job 39.5-8]

The wild ass or onager is so-called from the words for ‘burden’ (*onus*) and ‘field’ (*ager*), and it signifies the penitent man, who in the field of the Church bears the burden of penance. This man the Lord lets go free, and looses his bonds, when he permits him to depart freed from the slavery of the devil and loosed from the bonds of sin. Whence in John the Lord says:

*Loose him and let him go*. [Jn 11.44]

To him God gives a house in the wilderness of the mind, and a dwelling of the active life wherein he serves in the barren lands of worldly conversation. And so the penitent scorns the multitude of the city, of which the Lord says through the prophet:

*I am the Lord and I do not change*, [Mal 3.6]

nor enter the city; and David says:

*I have seen iniquity* (as to God) *and contradiction* (as to neighbour) *in the city*. [Ps 54.10]

He hears not the cry of the driver. The driver or ‘exactor’ is the devil, who once offered the coin of sin to the first parent and now ceaselessly demands daily repayment with usury. The penitent does not hear the voice of this exactor, since he pays no heed to his suggestions. Alternatively, the exactor may mean the belly, which daily demands clamorously the tribute of gluttony. But the penitent does not hear it at all, because he does not obey it for pleasure, only for necessity.

The wild ass looks around the mountains of his pasture because, being placed among the excellent things of life, he looks around and finds the pastures of Sacred Scripture;

and he says with the Psalmist:

*He hath set me in a place of pasture*; [Ps 22.2]

and so he seeks for every green thing in the devotion of prayer, so that from the pasture of sacred reading he comes to browse on the greenery of devout prayer, of which it is said, *Let the earth bring forth the green herb*.

19. There follows, *and producing seed*, by which fasting is signified- whence Isaiah says:

*Blessed are ye that sow upon the waters, entwining the foot of the ox and the ass*. [Is 32.20]

He sows upon the waters, who adds fasting to both prayer and the compunction that brings tears, and in this way he ‘entwines’ (with the bonds of the commandments) the foot (the affection) of the ox (the spirit) and the ass (the body). Thus the Lord says that this kind of demon (uncleanness of heart and the lust of the flesh) cannot be cast out except by prayer and fasting [cf. Mt 19.21]. By prayer we cleanse the heart from impure thoughts; by fasting we restrain the wantonness of the flesh.

There follows thirdly: *The fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind*. In the fruit-tree almsgiving is signified, which bears fruit among the needy, and by their hands is carried back into heaven. Notice the words: *yielding fruit according to its kind*. The ‘kind’ of man is the ‘other man’, created of the ground and quickened by the soul. One should therefore give alms, the ‘fruit according to one’s kind’, because the soul is refreshed by spiritual, and the body by corporeal, bread. Whence Job says:

*When thou visitest thy species, thou shalt not sin*. [Job 5.24]

Your ‘species’ is the other man, whom you ought to visit with alms both spiritual and corporeal; and in this way you will not sin against the commandment:

*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. [Mt 22.39]

But note the words ‘whose seed is in itself’. On this, St Augustine[4] comments: "He who wishes to give alms in due order, must start first with himself."

These three elements make perfect the satisfaction of penance, which is well represented by the sixth hour, namely mid-day, around which time the householder went out to send workers to cultivate the vineyard. Note too that mid-day, when the sun shines hotter than at any other part of the day, denotes the fervour of satisfaction. So towards the end of Deuteronomy we find:

*Nephtali shall enjoy abundance, and shall be full of the blessing of the Lord: he shall*

*possess the sea and the mid-day*. [Dt 33.23]

Nephtali means ‘converted’ or ‘enlarged’, and signifies the penitent who is converted from his evil way and enlarged in good works. He shall be made fruitful in this life with the abundance of grace, and will be filled with the blessing of glory. In order to attain his reward he must first possess the ‘sea’ (bitterness of heart) and the ‘mid-day’ (fervour of satisfaction).

**(A sermon on the love of God and neighbour: *Let there be two lights*. And note that from this text there can be drawn a sermon for the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul. Peter was the greater light, to rule the day, that is the Jews; Paul was the lesser light, to rule the night, that is the Gentiles.)**

20. On the fourth day God said: *Let there be two great lights in the firmament*. The fourth virtue is the love of God and of neighbour: the love of God being signified by the brightness of the sun, and the love of neighbour by the changeableness of the moon. Does it not seem to you that there is a certain changeableness,

*to rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep?* [Rom 12.15]

It is of these two things that there is said, towards the end of Deuteronomy,

*The land of Joseph shall be filled with the fruits of the sun and the moon*. [Dt 33.14]

These fruits stand for the works of the just man, on account of the gladness of perfection, the beauty of pure intention, and the sweet scent of good repute. These fruits are ‘of the sun and moon’, namely of the love of God and of neighbour, which are the two things that make anyone perfect. This twofold love is represented by the ninth hour, when the householder went forth. The perfection of these twin loves leads to the perfection of angelic blessedness, which is depicted in nine orders by the prophet Ezekiel under the image of nine precious stones, when he addresses Lucifer:

*Every precious stone was thy covering:*

*the sardius, the topaz, and the jasper,*

*the chrysolyte, and the onyx and the beryl,*

*the sapphire, and the carbuncle and the emerald*. [Ezek 28.13]

**(A sermon for contemplatives and on the property of the bird: *Man is born to labour*.)**

21. On the fifth day God made the fishes in the sea and the birds above the earth. The

fifth virtue is the exercise of the active and the contemplative life. The active man, like a fish, traverses the paths of the sea (the world) so as to be able to come to the aid of his neighbour who suffers need. Meanwhile the contemplative, like a bird, is lifted into the air upon the wings of contemplation and according to his capacity *gazes upon the King in his beauty* [Is 33.17]. As Job says,

*Man is born to labour and the bird to fly*. [Job 5.7]

'Labour' is the active life, 'flight' the contemplative life. And note that just as the bird which has a wide breast, inasmuch as it holds much air, is driven back by the wind; and that which has a narrow and restricted breast flies faster and without difficulty, so the mind of the contemplative, if it is filled with many and varied thoughts, is greatly impeded in the flight of contemplation; whereas if it is unified and recollected it begins to fly and is made fruitful in the joy of its contemplation. The exercise of this two-fold life is represented by the eleventh hour, when the householder went forth. The eleventh hour is made up of one and ten. The contemplative life is 'one', because it regards one God and one joy; the active life is 'ten', a reference to the ten precepts of the Law, by which the active life itself is made fully perfect in this life of exile.

**(A sermon on the two-fold glorification, namely of soul and body: *There shall be month after month*.)**

22. On the sixth day God said: *Let us make man to our own image and likeness*. The sixth and last virtue of the soul is final perseverance, which is the tail of the sacrificial victim and the many coloured coat of Joseph. Without it the possession of the previous virtues is useless; with it their possession is profitable, and in it (as on the sixth day) the image and likeness of God is eternally imprinted upon the face of the soul. This image is never to be soiled, never obliterated, never defiled.

This Gospel evening is the last hour of human life, the hour wherein the householder, through the steward who is his Son, gives his wage to the good worker in the vineyard. By it is signified the sabbath, which is interpreted 'rest'. It is to this that Isaiah refers when he says:

*There shall be month after month*,

meaning the perfection of glory coming from the perfection of this life, and

*and sabbath after sabbath*, [Is 66.23]

meaning eternal rest out of the rest of the heart, the double robe of soul and body.

The soul is glorified by three gifts, and the body by four. The soul is adorned with wisdom, friendship and concord. The wisdom of God is reflected in the face of the soul:

she will see God as he is, and she will know as she is known [cf. 1Jn 3.2; 1Cor 13.12]. There will be friendship with God; whence Isaiah says:

*Whose fire is in Zion, and a furnace in Jerusalem*. [Is 31.9]

Zion is the Church militant, the furnace is most ardent love, and Jerusalem is the Church triumphant. There will be harmony with neighbours, over whose glory she will rejoice just as much as over her own. The gifts of the body will be four in number: brightness, subtlety, agility and immortality, of which the Book of Wisdom says:

*The just shall shine*, (brightness)

*and like sparks in the straw* (subtlety)

*they shall run to and fro*, (agility)

*and their Lord shall reign for ever*. (immortality) [Wisd 3.7-8]

For *he is God not of the dead but of the living* [cf. Mt 22.32].

23. That we may deserve to receive this incorruptible crown, adorned with these seven precious stones, let us run as the Apostle bids us in today's Epistle:

*Know you not that they that run in the stadium all run indeed, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that you may obtain. And every one that striveth for the mastery refraineth himself in all things. And they indeed that they may receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible*. [1Cor 9.24-25]

A stadium is the eighth part of a mile, and consists of one hundred and twenty five paces. It signifies the labour of this exile, in which we must run in unity of faith, with steps of love numbering one hundred and twenty five. In this number the whole perfection of divine love is represented. The 'hundred', the perfect number, is the Gospel teaching; the 'twenty' are the ten precepts of the Law, which are to be fulfilled both according to the letter and according to the spirit; the 'five' are to be understood as the restraint of the pleasures of the five senses. He who runs in this stadium receives the prize, namely the reward of an incorruptible crown, concerning which the Apocalypse says:

*I will give you the crown of life, says the Lord*. [Apoc 2.10]

And so, dearest brethren, I pray and beseech that Lord with tears, that Lord who created and re-created us with his own blood; I pray that he may deign to establish us in the sevenfold eternal bliss. With him who is the Origin of all creatures, and by his grace, may we attain eternal life: who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] cf. AUGUSTINE, *Soliloquiorum* II,1,1; PL 32.885

[2] OVID, *Remedia amoris*, 323-324

[3] cf. AUGUSTINE, *De Genesi ad litteram*, VI,12,22; PL 34.348

[4] AUGUSTINE, *Enchiridion*, 76; PL 40.268

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## SEXAGESIMA

**(The second Gospel is for Sexagesima: *The sower went out to sow*. The Introit of the Mass: *Arise, why sleepest thou, O Lord?* The Epistle: *You gladly suffer*. The History of Noah and his ark.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for preachers. The supreme preacher: *Isaac sowed in the land of Gerar*.)**

1. *The sower went out to sow his seed* [Lk 8.5]

This is what Isaiah says to preachers:

*Blessed are ye that sow upon all waters*. [Is 32.20]

According to St John,

*The waters are peoples*; [Apoc 17.15]

and Solomon writes:

*All the rivers run into the sea;*

*unto the place from whence the rivers come, they return again*. [Eccles 1.7]

This suggests the two-fold bitterness of original sin and bodily death. For just as the rivers originate in the salty sea, so the peoples of the earth arise in the bitterness of original sin. David says:

*Behold, I was conceived in iniquities*, [Ps 50.7]

and St Paul says:

*We were by nature children of wrath*. [Eph 2.3]

And just as the rivers return to the sea, so human life ends in the bitterness of death. In the words of Ecclesiasticus:

*A heavy yoke is upon the children of Adam,*

*from the day of their coming out of their mothers' womb*

*until the day of their burial in the mother of all*, [Ecclus 40.1]

and:

*O death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee!* [Ecclus 41.1]

The Lord himself says to the sinner, *You are earth*, 'soiled' in your very conception, *and to earth you will return* [cf. Gen 3.9] at the dissolution of your body. Let all this be as it were a background to the text, *Blessed are ye that sow upon all waters*.

The seed, as our Lord himself explains in today's Gospel, is the Word of God. I pray that I myself may be found worthy to share in the blessedness of the blessed! That is why I wish to cast seed upon you, in the name of Jesus Christ. He went forth from the bosom of the Father, and entered the world to sow his seed. The God of the New Testament is one and the same as the God of the Old, and is indeed Jesus Christ the Son of God. We may apply to him the words of Isaiah:

*I myself that spoke, behold, I am here*. [Is 52.6]

I spoke to the fathers in the prophets; I am here in the truth of the Incarnation. That is the justification for seeking to **concord** the scriptures of both Testaments, to God's honour and for the benefit of you, my hearers. Let us say, then, *A sower went out to sow*, etc.

2. This Sunday we read in Church the Gospel of the sower and the seed, while at Mattins we tell the story of Noah and how he built the ark. In the Introit of the Mass we sing, *Arise, why sleepest thou, O Lord?* and in St Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians we read, *You gladly suffer the foolish*. These are the texts we must **concord**, in the Lord's name.

In the Gospel of the sower there are six things in particular for us to take note of: the sower, the seed, the wayside, the stony ground, the thorns and the good soil. In the same way there are six points in the story of Noah: Noah himself, and the ark with its five compartments, called the bilges (or 'dung-hold'), the store-hold, the deck of the wild animals, that of the domestic animals, and that for human beings and birds. But note carefully that in this **concordance** the fourth and fifth will be taken as one. Let it be said, then: *The sower went out*, etc.

**(A sermon on the making of the ark of Noah, and what it means: *Make thee an ark*.)**

3. The sower stands both for Christ and for whoever preaches Christ. The seed is God's Word; the wayside those who live for pleasure; the stony ground those who make a pretence of religion; the thorns the greedy and covetous; and the good soil those who are penitent and righteous. This interpretation, as I say, is based on the recognised authorities.

The sower is Christ. You have in Genesis:

*Isaac sowed in the land of Gerar, and that same year he received an hundredfold*.

[Gen 26.12]

Isaac (whose name means 'joy' or 'laughter') may be taken as standing for Christ, who is the joy of the saints- those saints who, according to Isaiah, *shall obtain joy and gladness* [Is 35.10]. Joy from the glorified humanity of Christ, and gladness from the vision of the divine Trinity. Christ our Isaac 'sowed in the land of Gerar', the land of exile. This refers to the world, of which the prophet says:

*Woe is me that my sojourning is prolonged!* [Ps 119.5]

(meaning, 'my pilgrimage'). In the land of Gerar, in this world, he sows three sorts of seed: the example of his holy life, his preaching of the kingdom of heaven, and the miracles he performed.

*And that same year he received a hundredfold*. The whole life of Christ constitutes 'the acceptable year of the Lord' of remission and goodwill. Just as a year has four seasons, winter, spring, summer and autumn, so Christ's life falls into four phases. It begins in winter, with Herod's persecution and the flight into Egypt. Its spring is the period of his preaching, when

*the flowers appear in the earth,*

in the promise of eternal life, and

*the voice of the turtle is heard in our land*, [Cant 2.12]

the voice of the Son of God, who cried out:

*Do penance, for the kingdom of God is at hand!* [Mt 4.17]

The summer's heat stands for the Passion, after Isaiah's words:

*He meditated with his severe spirit on the day of heat*. [Is 27.8]

The ‘day of heat’ is the Passion, and he endured it in a steadfast spirit, unflinchingly suffering upon the cross, and there taking thought for the destruction of the devil, the freeing of the human race from his power, and the eternal punishment of those obstinate in sin. The same prophet uses the phrase:

*The day of vengeance is in my heart*. [Is 63.4]

Autumn refers to the Resurrection, when his humanity was harvested, winnowed from the chaff of suffering and the dust of mortality, and stored in the barn, the right hand of God the Father. How appropriate the words, *In the same year he received a hundredfold*, for he chose the apostles to whom he said: *Ye shall receive an hundredfold* [Mt 19.29]. He also carried home upon his own shoulders, fastened to the cross- carried home rejoicing- the hundredth sheep, the human race, to join the company of the nine orders of angels. Yes, indeed! The sower is clearly Christ!

4. Christ is also symbolised by Noah, to whom God said:

> *Make thee an ark of timber planks; thou shalt make in the ark little rooms, and thou shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And thus shalt thou make it: the length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits*.
>
> [Gen 6.14-15]

The name Noah means ‘rest’, and again refers to Jesus Christ who said in the Gospel:

*Come to me all you that labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest*. [Mt 11.28]

We labour in Egypt, in the mud of lust and the bricks of avarice; and we are burdened with the heavy yoke of pride. Genesis says:

> *This same shall comfort us from the works and labours of our hands on the ground which the Lord hath cursed*. [Gen 5.29]

the Father said, *Make thee an ark*. This ark represents the Church. Christ, then, went out to sow his seed, and he also went out to build his Church. He built it of ‘smoothed’ wood, meaning those who are holy, pure and perfect. He lined it with the pitch of mercy and love, both within- that is, in their inner affections- and without, in the effect of their works. The length is three hundred cubits. The Church contains three categories of people- prelates, religious and married people- who are represented by Noah, Daniel and Job. The width is fifty cubits. This reminds us of the Church’s penitents, because it was on the fiftieth day after the Passover that grace was poured out on the apostles by the Holy

Spirit. It is also in the fiftieth psalm, *Have mercy on me, O God*, that remission of sins is promised to those who are penitent. The height is thirty cubits, and this reminds us of the ordinary faithful of the Church, who believe in the Holy Trinity. In short, then, Christ goes out from the bosom of the Father and comes into the world to sow his seed and to build his Church, in which the incorruptible and everlasting harvest is to be stored.

5. There follows, regarding the seed: *The seed is the word of God*, to which Solomon is referring when he says: *In the morning sow thy seed* [Eccles 11.6]. In the morning- that is to say, in the time of grace which drives away the darkness of sin. That is the time, O preacher, to sow your seed, that Word which has been entrusted to you. The seed which is sown in the ground germinates and grows,

*first the blade, then the ear, afterwards the full corn in the ear*, [Mk 4.28]

as our Lord says in St Mark's Gospel. In the same way, the Word of God sown in the heart of a sinner first produces the blade of contrition. We read in Genesis,

*Let the earth bring forth the green herb*, [Gen 1.11]

and in the same way the heart of a sinner brings forth contrition. Then comes the 'ear' which is confession. Confession lifts up the soul by giving her the hope of forgiveness. Finally, the 'full corn in the ear' is satisfaction. The Psalmist says,

*The vales shall abound with corn*. [Ps 64.14]

The humble and penitent bring forth the fulness of satisfaction, so that penalty and fault are in due proportion. Well said, then: *The sower went out to sow his seed*.

**(A sermon against the lustful: *And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside*.)**

6. But not everyone is faithful! Not everyone obeys the Gospel! That is why the parable continues:

> *And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.* [Lk 8.5]

The bottom-most chamber of Noah's ark, traditionally, is the bilge or 'dung-hold'. The pathway trodden under foot and this 'dung-hold' have the same meaning. They stand for those who pursue the pleasures of lust. Solomon says:

*Every woman that is a harlot shall be trodden like dung upon the path*, [Ecclus 9.10]

and Isaiah has this rebuke for the lustful:

*Thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as a way to them that went over*. [Is 51.23]

This refers to the devils, who as they pass tread down the seed so that it does not germinate. Isaiah says again:

*The crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under feet*. [Is 28.31]

Ephraim means 'fruitful', and it stands for the abundance of temporal goods. The drunkards are the pleasure-seekers who are inebriated with the gold chalice of Babylon, temporal abundance; and the crown of pride on the head is the haughty thought of a corrupt mind. This will be trodden by the feet of the demons when the impure thought issues in the besotted action of lust. Indeed, the seed of the Lord cannot germinate in such accursed soil!

The demons are also referred to as 'fowls of the air', because of their pride and because they are supposed to dwell in the air. They seize and devour the seed from the lustful hearts, lest it bear fruit. Hosea says:

*Strangers have devoured his strength*, [Hos 7.9]

meaning that the demons have eaten the strength of the divine word. Notice also that the seed is said to have fallen by, rather than in, the wayside, because the lustful man does not receive the word within his heart's ear, but as a mere sound that lightly passes by the ear of his body. Such folk are the 'dung-hold', stinking like oxen in their dung. The Psalmist says of them:

*They perished at Endor: they became as dung for the earth*. [Ps 82.11]

Endor means 'the fire of generation', that is, 'the heat of lust'. From this dung four worms are generated, namely: simple fornication, adultery, incest, and sin against nature. Simple fornication is a mortal sin between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. It is called 'fornication' from *formae necatio*, the death of the soul made in the likeness of God. Adultery (*alterius torum*) is the sin of approaching the marriage-bed of another. Incest is sin between those closely related by blood or marriage. Sin against nature refers to any act whereby the semen is ejaculated other than in the proper place for conception, the vagina of a woman. All these are 'the way trodden down by demons', the 'dung-hold of the ark'. In them the seed of the divine word perishes and is snatched away by the devil.

**(A sermon against false religious: *And some fell upon a rock*.)**

7. There follows:

> *And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture*. [Lk 8.6]

The second chamber in Noah's ark is the store-hold, and both rock and store-hold stand for false religious. The rock, because they glory in the excellence of their religion; the store-hold, because they exchange what is truly valuable in their lives for the coin of human praise. *Some fell upon a rock* is a phrase recalling the words of the prophet Obadiah rebuking a proud religious man:

*The pride of thy heart hath lifted thee up,*

*who dwellest in the clefts of the rock,*

*who setteth up thy throne on high*. [Ob 1.3]

Pride (*superbia*, from *super-eo*, 'go above'), the pride of your heart, O you religious man, has lifted you up out of yourself, so that in vanity you go above yourself and dwell in the clefts of the rock! The 'rock' refers to the religious state in the Church (of any Order), recalling the words of Jeremiah:

*The snow shall never fail from the rock of the field*. [Jer 18.14]

The field is the Church, the rock of the field is the religious life founded upon the rock of faith, and the snow is cleanness of mind and heart which should never be lacking from that state. But alas, alas! How many clefts, splits, divisions and dissensions are in the rock, in religious life! If the seed of the divine word falls here, it bears no fruit because it does not have the moisture of the Holy Spirit, which does not dwell in the clefts of discord but in the habitations of unity.

*They were of one heart and one soul*, [Acts 4.32]

says St Luke. Truly there are clefts where there is strife in Chapter, carelessness in choir, wantonness in the dormitory! How well the Lord says *And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up it withered away, because* (in St Matthew's words) *it had no root*, meaning humility which is the root of all virtues. See how obvious it is that divisions in religious life come from pride of heart! Without the root of humility, how can it bear fruit?

Such religion is just a warehouse, the 'store-hold of the ark'. After internal division comes a hankering for worldly praise. Like shop-keepers in the market-place, false religious sell goods that are just showy. Under the religious habit, disguised by a false appearance, they seek praise. They make a pretence of perfection among men, seeking to pose as saints without the trouble of actually being saints! What a disgrace! Religious life should preserve the beauty of virtue, the sweet smell of a good life- yet it is destroyed and made

a place of barter! This is what Joel deplores when he says:

*The barns are destroyed, the storehouses are broken down;*

*because the corn is confounded*. [Joel 1.17]

We may apply these words to the cloisters of canons and the monasteries of monks. The corn, white inside and golden outside, stands for charity which maintains purity with respect to oneself and love with respect to our neighbour. This corn is so scattered that when it falls upon the rock it withers as it springs up, because it lacks the root of humility and the moisture of the sevenfold grace. See how from the loss of charity (the scattering of the grain) there follows the destruction of religious life (the barn in which it should be stored.

**(A sermon against the avaricious and usurers: *And some fell among thorns*.)**

8. There follows:

*And some fell among thorns, and the thorns growing up with it, choked it*. [Lk 8.7]

The third chamber in Noah's ark is the hold of the wild, undomesticated, animals. Thorns and wild beasts have much in common! They both represent greedy and covetous people. Avarice is like thorns which catch, pierce and draw blood. Covetousness is like a wild animal that seizes and devours. When the Lord says, *Some fell among thorns*, he provides the gloss himself: the thorns are riches, which catch a man and hold him back. Peter, so as not be caught and held in that way, told the Lord:

*Behold, we have left all things and followed thee*. [Mt 19.27]

St Bernard[1] comments, "Well done, Peter! You could hardly follow a running man while carrying a burden!" The thorns pierce, too. Jeremiah says:

*Egypt is like a fair and beautiful heifer, but destruction cometh out of the north*. [Jer 46.20]

Egypt (meaning 'darkness') is the avaricious man, in the darkness of ignorance. He is a 'heifer' both on account of his lustful flesh and of his unstable mind. He is 'very fair', crowded round with family and hangers-on, 'very fair' too with all his houses and fine raiment. But 'destruction' (the devil) comes from 'the north', for as Jeremiah says elsewhere:

*From the north an evil shall break forth*. [Jer 1.14]

The devil stings him with the sting of avarice, so that he runs hither and thither to gather the thorns, those riches of which Isaiah says:

*As a bundle of thorns they shall be burnt with fire*. [Is 33.12]

The thorn pierces, and as it pierces it draws blood. According to Moses,

*The life of all flesh is in the blood*. [Lev 17.14]

The lifeblood of the soul is virtue, wherein the soul lives. The avaricious man loses this lifeblood, virtue, when he sets his heart on amassing riches. Ecclesiasticus says:

*There is not a more wicked thing than to love money,*

*for such a one setteth his own soul to sale*. [Ecclus 10.10]

The Lord says of such, *Thorns sprang up and choked it*, and Hosea:

*The burr and the thistle shall grow up over their altars*. [Hos 10.8]

The burr is a weed which clings to the clothing, while the thistle troubles by pricking the skin. These ‘burrs and thistles’ are riches, which stick to the passer-by or prick him. These ‘come up on their altars’, the hearts of the covetous, upon which they ought to offer God the sacrifice of a contrite heart. They choke the seed of God’s word, and the sacrifice of a broken heart.

9. **Concordant** to the thorns in the parable are the wild animals in Noah’s ark, which aptly symbolise pitiless usurers. The Psalmist speaks of

*The great and wide sea, wherein are creeping things without number,*

*creatures little and great. There the ships go*. [Ps 103.25-26]

‘The sea’ is this world, full of bitterness, great with riches, wide with delights. Wide is the path that leads to death, but to whom? Not to the poor of Christ who ‘enter through the narrow gate’. Rather to grasping usurers, who have already taken the whole world into their hands. Because of their usuries, churches are impoverished and monasteries stripped of their goods. The Lord complained of them through Joel:

*A nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number;*

*his teeth are like the teeth of a lion,*

*and his cheek teeth as of a lion’s whelp.*

*He hath laid my vineyard waste,*

*and hath pilled of the bark from my fig tree;*

*he hath stripped it bare, and cast it away;*

*the branches thereof are made white*. [Joel 1.6-7]

The accursed race of usurers has multiplied upon the earth, with *teeth like the teeth of a lion*. The lion has two characteristics- a stiff neck containing only one bone, and stinking teeth. The usurer likewise is inflexible, *neither fearing God nor regarding man*. His teeth stink because the dirt of money and the dung of usury are always in his mouth. His cheek teeth, the molars, are like a lion-cub's because he seizes the goods of the poor, of orphans and widows, chews them up and swallows them. He makes the vineyard, God's Church, a desert when he holds onto its possessions as pledges of usury. He barks, strips and despoils the Lord's fig tree (any religious house) when he appropriates to himself the goods given to that community by the faithful. Its branches are made white, as the monks or canons professed in it are afflicted with hunger and thirst. See the hands that purport to bestow alms, but are stained with the blood of the poor! No wonder the Psalmist speaks of *creeping things without number* in the world!

We may observe three kinds of usurer: those who lend money privately, who may be described as *creeping things without number*; those who do so openly, but only in a small way, so as to seem merciful- these are the *small beasts*; and the faithless, hopeless and open usurers who, as openly as in a market place, take interest from all and sundry. These are the *great beasts*, crueller than all the rest. They will be pursued by the demon huntsmen and slain with an eternal death, unless they restore their ill-gotten gains and do penance. To give them the opportunity to do so, *there go the ships* among them, the preachers of the Church who pass among them and sow the seed of God's word. Yet, though our sins need it, the thorns of riches and the wild beasts of usury choke the word sown so devotedly, so that it does not produce the fruit of penance.

**(A sermon for actives and contemplatives: *And some fell on good ground*.)**

10. There follows:

> *Some fell on good ground, and being sprung up yielded fruit,some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, some an hundred-fold*. [Lk 8.8]

The fourth chamber of Noah's ark is that containing the domesticated animals, and the fifth is that containing men and birds. You have seen, beloved, how in the previous cases- the wayside or dung-hold of the lustful, the stony ground or store-hold of the proud religious, and the thorns or wild beasts of the avaricious and usurers- the seed of God's word could bear no fruit. That is why the faithful of God's Church cry out in the Introit of today's Mass:

*Arise, why sleepest thou, O Lord?*

*Arise, and cast us not off to the end:*

*wherefore turnest thou thy face away*

*and forgettest our want and our trouble?*

*Our soul is humbled down to the earth;*

*arise, O Lord, help us and redeem us*. [Ps 43.23]

Three times they say, ‘Arise!’, because of the wayside, the stony ground and the thorns. Arise, O Lord, against the lustful who are in the way of the devil, and who, because they themselves sleep in sin, believe that you sleep also! Arise against false religious, who are like stony ground devoid of the moisture of grace! Arise against the usurers, who are like piercing thorns! Help us and free us from their hands! In these three, O Lord, the seed of your word can bear no fruit. Only when it falls on good ground does it become fruitful.

11. Note how well the good ground is **concordant** to the domesticated animals, men and birds. These stand for righteous, penitent souls, both active and contemplative. The good earth which the Lord has blessed is that righteous mind of which the Psalmist says:

*Let all the earth adore thee and sing to thee:*

*let it sing a psalm to thy name*. [Ps 65.4]

The whole earth means east, west, north and south. The righteous mind is the eastern land when it considers its origin; the western when it remembers its death; the north when it considers the temptations and miseries of this world; and the southern when it considers eternal blessedness. So may all the earth, the good and righteous mind, worship you, O God, in spirit and in truth and in contrition of heart. This is to bring forth fruit thirty-fold. Let it praise you by confessing your name and acknowledging its own sin. This is to bring forth fruit sixty-fold. Let it sing a psalm to your name in works of satisfaction and in final perseverance. This is the perfect, hundred-fold, fruit.

12. An alternative interpretation is to take the good earth as Holy Church itself, the Ark of Noah with the domestic animals, birds and men. The domestic animals are those faithful who are married, performing works of penance, giving to the por, injuring no-one. The Apostle refers to them in today’s Epistle:

*You gladly suffer the foolish; whereas you yourselves are wise. For you*

> *suffer if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take from you, if a man be lifted up, if a man strike you on the face*. [2Cor 11.19-20]

These are they that bring forth fruit thirty-fold. 'Men' stand for those who are both continent and active. They are truly 'men', using their reason. These submit themselves to the labour of the active life, exposing themselves to danger for their neighbour's sake, preaching eternal life by word and example, watching over themselves and those in their care. These, in St Paul's words, are

> *in labour and painfulness; in much watchings; in hunger and thirst; in fastings often; in cold and nakedness*, etc. [2Cor 11.27]

These bring forth fruit sixty-fold. The 'birds' in the upper part of the ark represent virgins and contemplatives, who are lifted up on the wings of virtue, and contemplate *the King in his beauty*. These are taken up into the air (in mind rather than in body), rapt in contemplation to the third heaven, contemplating the glory of the Trinity in pureness of spirit, where they hear with the heart's ear what they cannot express in words, or even comprehend with their mind. these are they that bear fruit a hundred-fold.

O Lord Jesus, make us, we pray, that good earth which is able to receive the word of your grace and to bear fruit, fruit worthy of repentance. So may we be found worthy to live eternally in your glory, in your presence; you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] cf. BERNARD [=GAUFRIDUS], *Declamationes*, 2; PL 184.438

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## QUINQUAGESIMA

**(The third Gospel, for Quinquagesima: *A blind man sat by the wayside*.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for preachers: *Samuel took*.)**

1. *A blind man sat by the way-side, and cried: Son of David, have mercy on me*. [Lk 18.35,38]

The First Book of Kings tells how

*Samuel took a little vial of oil; and poured it upon Saul's head*. [1Sam 10.1]

The name Samuel means 'asked for', and signifies the preacher who is asked for by the Church from Jesus Christ, who says in the Gospel:

*Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth labourers into his harvest*. [Mt 9.38]

He must take a vial of oil (a four-sided vessel, representing the teaching of the four-fold Gospel), and from it he must pour the oil of preaching upon the head of Saul, that is, the mind of the sinner. Saul means 'misuse', and is a suitable name for the sinner who misuses the gifts of grace and of nature.

Note that oil both anoints and gives light. In the same way preaching anoints and softens the skin of the sinner (his conscience), 'grown old in evil days' [cf. Dan 13.52] and hardened by sin. It anoints the athlete of Christ, and sends him forth to the contest, to do battle against the powers of the air. Just so, in the third book of Kings, Zadok anointed Solomon in Gihon. Zadok is 'righteous', meaning the preacher who, like a priest, offers sacrifice upon the altar of the Lord's Passion. He anoints Solomon ('peaceful') in Gihon ('struggle'). The preacher, with the oil of preaching, must anoint the converted sinner for the struggle, so that he does not give in to the suggestions of the devil, treads down the allurements of the flesh, and despises the deceitful world. Oil also gives light, and preaching enlightens the eye of reason, so that it becomes capable of seeing the light of the true sun. In the name of Jesus Christ, then, I will take up the vial of the holy Gospel, and from it I will pour the oil of preaching, to enlighten the eyes of that blind man of

whom it is said: *A blind man sat*.

2. This Sunday we read the Gospel of the enlightening of the blind man, which also speaks of the Passion of Christ. In the Office we read the story of Abraham's wanderings and the sacrifice of his son Isaac. The Introit at Mass is, *Be thou my God and defender*, and the Epistle (from St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians) is, *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels*. So, for the honour of God and the enlightenment of your soul, let us **concord** all these things!

**(A sermon against the proud man: *A blind man sat*; and on the property of a nest, and of menstrual blood.)**

3. *A blind man sat*. Passing over all the other blind men who had their sight restored, we will mention only three. The first is the man in the Gospel, blind from birth, whose sight was restored with mud and spittle. The second is Tobias, blinded by the swallow's dung, but cured by the fish's gall. The third is the Bishop of Laodicea, to whom the Lord says in the Apocalypse:

> *Thou knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold, fire-tried, that thou mayest be made rich and mayest be clothed in white garments; and that the shame of thy nakedness may not appear. And anoint thy eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see*. [Apoc 3.17.18]

We shall explore the meaning of each of these.

The man blind from birth is the human race, blinded by our first parents. Taking this story allegorically, Jesus enlightened the blind man when he spat on the ground and spread mud on his eyes. Spittle (coming from the head) represents the divine nature; earth is human nature. The mixture of spittle and dust is the union of the divine and human natures, by which the whole human race was restored to light. This is also the meaning of the blind man's words as he sat by the way-side and cried out, *Have mercy on me*, (referring to the divinity), *Son of David*, (referring to his humanity).

4. Morally. The blind man stands for the proud man, whose pride is described like this by the prophet Obadiah:

*Though thou be exalted as an eagle,*

*and though thou set thy nest among the stars:*

*thee will I bring down, says the Lord.* [Ob 1.4]

The eagle, which flies higher than any other bird, represents the proud man, who seeks to seem higher than everyone else, by the two wings of arrogance and vainglory. To him is said, *If among the stars* (that is, among the saints who in this dark world shine like stars in the firmament) *you set your place* (your life), *Thence I will bring you down, says the Lord*. The proud man tries to establish the nest of his life in the company of the saints; which is why Job says:

*The wing of the ostrich is like the wings of the heron and of the hawk*. [Job 39.13]

The ostrich is the hypocrite, the hawk the just man. A nest has three characteristics: it is lined with soft material inside, but it is hard and prickly outside, and it is set precariously, exposed to the wind. In the same way the life of the proud man has a certain inner softness, sensual pleasure; but outwardly it is all girt about with the thorns and dry sticks of dead works. Moreover, it is exposed to the wind of vanity, and set precariously, for the man does not know from evening to morning when he will be taken from the midst of it. So these words follow: *Thence I will bring you down*. I will pull you out of it and thrust you to the depths, says the Lord; and in the Apocalypse he says:

*As much as she hath glorified herself and lived in delicacies,*

*so much torment and sorrow give ye to her*. [Apoc 18.7]

5. Note that the blind, proud man is enlightened by spittle and mud. The spittle stands for his father's seed, which was emitted into the sorrowful frame of his mother, wherein the wretched man was conceived. Pride would not have blinded him if he had but paid attention to the lowly circumstances of his origin. Isaiah says:

*Look unto the rock whence you are hewn,*

*and to the hole of the pit from which you are dug out*. [Is 51.1]

We may regard 'the rock' as a reference to our father according to the flesh; while 'the hole of the pit' refers to our mother's body. From him we are hewn out in the effusion of seed; from her we are dug out in the pain of child-birth. What is there to be proud of, wretched man, begotten from vile spittle and created in an abhorrent pit, where for nine months you were nourished with the blood of menstruation? If this blood touches the crops they will not ripen; the vintages turn sour, plants die, trees lose their fruit. Iron becomes rusty and bronze is tarnished. If dogs consume it they become rabid, and their bite becomes deadly, causing madness. Indeed, even women (when there is no need, and though they are subject to the laws of their nature) may not gaze upon it with guiltless eyes. Mirrors crack as if struck by lightning, and the bright reflection is beclouded and darkened. If only you would attentively ponder these things, wretched man, proud blind man, and remember that you are born of 'spittle and mud', in very truth you would be enlightened, and you would become truly humble.

And to confirm the foregoing interpretation of Isaiah, that it is a reference to carnal generation, the following verse makes it clear:

*Look unto Abraham your father and to Sarah that bare you*.

The Lord tells the proud blind man to

*Go forth out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house*. [Gen 12.1]

There are three sorts of pride: towards inferiors, towards equals and towards superiors. The proud man treads underfoot, despises and mocks. He treads on his inferiors as on the ground (indeed, he 'grinds them down'). He despises his equals ("familiarity breeds contempt") and has no difficulty in looking down on those close to him. He even mocks his superior, whom he should respect as his father. The superior may well be termed 'his father's house', because he should be subject to him as a son in the paternal home. Here there is shelter from the rain of carnal lust, the storm of devilish persecution and the heat of worldly prosperity. But the blind, proud man turns up his nose and pulls a face at his superior; so the Lord says "Go out, O proud blind man! Go out from your country, lest you tread on your inferior. Go out from your kindred, lest you despise your equals. Go out from your father's house, lest you mock your superior."

6. There follows: *And go into the land which I will show you*. This land is the humanity of Jesus Christ, of which the Lord is speaking when he tells Moses, in Exodus,

*Put off the shoes from thy feet: for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground*. [Ex 3.5]

The shoes are dead works, which you must put off your feet (the affections of your mind) because the ground (the humanity of Jesus Christ on which you stand by faith) is holy and sanctifies you, sinner that you are. Go then, proud man, go into the land. Consider the humanity of Christ, attend to his humility, repress the swelling of your heart. Go, I say, with steps of love. Draw near in humbleness of heart and say with the prophet,

*In thy truth thou hast humbled me*. [Ps 118.75]

O Father, in your Truth (that is to say, in your Son, humbled, needy and homeless) you have humbled me. He was humbled in the womb of the Virgin, needy in the manger of the sheep, and homeless on the wood of the Cross. Nothing so humbles the proud sinner as the humility of Jesus Christ's humanity. So Isaiah says:

*O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and wouldst come down.*

*The mountains would melt away at thy presence*. [Is 64.1]

The mountains of pride melt away and fail before your face, present in the humanity of Jesus Christ, considering the head of divinity bowed down in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

Go into the land which I have pointed out to you as with a finger at the River Jordan, saying, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased* [Mt 3.17]. You too will be my beloved in whom I am well pleased, my son adopted by grace, if only you will be humbled by the example of my co-equal Son, whom I will show you in such a way that from the shape of his life you may shape the conduct of your own life. So shaped, you will receive life and be enabled to hear the words, "*Receive your sight; your faith has saved you*." Your faith has enlightened you.

**(A sermon against the lukewarm and lustful: *It happened one day*.)**

7. The second blind man is Tobias, who was blinded by the swallow’s droppings, but cured by the fish’s gall. In the Book named after him we are told:

> *Now it happened one day that, being wearied with burying, he came to his house and cast himself down beside the wall and slept. And as he was sleeping, hot dung out of a swallow’s nest fell upon his eyes, and he was made blind*. [Tob 2.10-11]

Very briefly, we must see what is meant by Tobias, burying, the house, the wall, sleep, the nest, the swallows and their dung: Tobias is the righteous but luke-warm man; burying is doing penance; the house is the care of the body; the wall is the pleasure of the body; the sleep is the torpor of negligence; the nest is the consent of an enfeebled mind; the swallows are the demons; and their dung is greed and lust. Let us say, then: *Tobias, wearied from burying*, etc.

Tobias here stands for the good man who is only luke-warm. As the Lord says in the Apocalypse,

*Because thou art neither cold* (with the fear of punishment)

*nor hot* (with the love of grace),

*but because thou art luke-warm I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth*. [Apoc 3.16]

Just as tepid water induces vomiting, so half-heartedness and negligence expel the lazy and luke-warm from the bowels of divine mercy. *Cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord negligently* [cf. Jer 48.10].

Wearied from burying he comes to his house. Tired of doing penance (by means of

which he buries the corpses of mortal sin (as the Scripture says, *Blessed are they whose sins are covered*) he reverts to the care of the flesh and its desires, against the advice of the Apostle.

So it continues: *he cast himself down beside the wall*. This wall is the pleasure of the flesh. Just as in a wall one stone is laid upon another, and they are cemented together, so in fleshly pleasure the sins of the eye are added to those of the ear, and those of the ear to those of taste, and so on, and bad habit fastens them all together like mortar. So the sinner sleeps, relaxed in the torpor of carelessness, and the dung of the swallows falls upon his eyes.

The swallows, because they fly so swiftly, represent the demons whose pride seeks to soar above the stars of the sky, to the height of the clouds and to an equality with the Father like that of the Son [cf. Is 14.13-14].

The devils' nest is the consent of an enfeebled mind, and it is made of the feathers of vainglory and the mud of wantonness. From a nest like this the droppings of greed and lust fall upon the eyes of the sleeping Tobias, and his reason and understanding, the eyes of his unhappy soul, are blinded.

8. Do be watchful, dear brethren, and beware of falling into such a sad state. First comes weariness of burying (penance), then return to the house of carnal care and, with an appearance of necessity, repose beside the wall of pleasure. While overcome by the sleep of negligence one is blinded by the dung of lust. As the poet[1] says,

"If you ask why Aegisthus became an adulterer,

the reason is clear: he had nothing better to do!"

So cry out, luke-warm Tobias, you blind and lustful man lying by the wall! Cry, *Have mercy on me, Son of David!*

In the Introit of today's Mass the blind man prays for enlightenment, saying, *Be thou my God and defender*. He prays for four things. First, in the words, *Be thou my God and defender*, he asks God to protect and defend him with arms outstretched on the Cross, as a hen spreads her wings over her young. Secondly, saying, *and a place of refuge*, he seeks in Christ's side, pierced by the lance, a place of refuge in which to hide from the face of the enemy. Thirdly, he says, *Thou art my upholder* (lest I fall) *and my refuge*. On you I fall back, casting myself on you alone and on no other. Fourthly he says, *For thy holy name's sake be thou my leader*, Son of David, so that in my blindness you reach out to me the hand of mercy, and feed me with the milk of your grace. *Have mercy on me*, then, *Son of David!*

**(A sermon on the Passion of Christ: *Take the entrails of the fish*.)**

9. The Son of God and of David, the ‘Angel of Great Counsel’, who is both the physician and the medicine of the human race, gives this counsel in the same Book of Tobias, saying:

*Take the entrails of the fish, and remove its gall, and anoint thine eyes*, [Tob 6.5,9]

and thus you will be able to regain your sight. Allegorically, the fish is Christ, who was roasted upon the grill of the Cross. Its gall is the bitterness of the Passion, whereby, if you anoint the eyes of your soul with it, you will receive your sight. The bitterness of the Lord’s Passion drives out all the blindness of lust, and all the dung of carnal desire. So a certain wise man[2] says, "The remembrance of the crucified crucifies all vices," and in the Book of Ruth we read:

*Dip thy morsel in the vinegar*. [Ruth 2.14]

This ‘morsel’ is the momentary gratification of the wretched, which you should dip into the ‘vinegar’, the bitterness of Jesus Christ’s Passion.

The Lord tells you, then, what he told Abraham in this Sunday’s reading:

> *Take thy son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and go into the land of vision and there thou shalt offer him for an holocaust*. [Gen 22.2]

Isaac means ‘laughter’ or ‘rejoicing’, and in the moral interpretation he represents our flesh, when it is smiled on by temporal success, and rejoices in the fulfilment of its desires. Solomon says of it:

*Laughter* (temporal things) *I counted error*

(because they cause one to wander from the way of truth);

*and to mirth* (the flesh) *I said: Why art thou vainly deceived?* [Eccles 2.2]

Take your son, then, your flesh which you love and which you nourish so carefully. Wretched man, you do not realise that the plague itself is not more harmful than this enemy of your own household! Solomon says:

*He that nourisheth his servant delicately from his childhood,*

*afterwards he shall find him stubborn*. [Prov 29.21]

*Take him away, take him away! He is guilty of death!* And Pilate (carnal affection) asks, *What evil has he done?* O what evils your laughter, your son, has done! He has

despised God, scandalized his neighbour and brought death upon his own soul! And do you ask, "What evil has he done?" *Take him*, then, *and go into the Land of Vision*.

10. The Land of Vision was where Jerusalem stands, the very place spoken of in today's Gospel:

*Jesus took the twelve disciples apart, and said to them: Behold, we go up to Jerusalem*.

[Mt 20.17-18]

You too must take your son and go up with Jesus and his Apostles to Jerusalem, and there offer him upon the altar, by meditation upon the Lord's Passion, by the Cross of penitence, and by the sacrifice of your body. The word used is 'holocaust', the burnt offering of an entire animal. You must offer your whole son, your whole body, to Jesus Christ; for he offered himself totally to God the Father, *that he might destroy the whole body of sin* [cf. Rom 6.6].

Note that our human body is made up of the four elements, fire, air, water and earth: fire is in the eyes, air in the mouth, water in the loins and earth in the hands and feet. In the sinner's body, since he is a slave to sin, fire flourishes in the eyes by curiosity, air in the mouth by talkativeness, water in the loins by lust and earth in the hands and feet by cruelty. The Son of God veiled his face (on which the angels long to gaze) to restrain the curiosity of our eyes. He was dumb before, not just his shearer but his murderer, and when he was ill-treated he did not open his mouth, so as to check your talkativeness. His side was opened by the lance, so that he might draw out of you the moisture of lust. His hands and feet were fastened with nails, to drive cruelty from your hands and feet. Take your son, then, your mirth, your flesh, and offer it completely as a holocaust, so that you may be wholly on fire with charity that covers a multitude of sins.

In today's Epistle the Apostle says:

*If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity,*

*I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal*. [1Cor 13.1]

St Augustine[3] says, "Charity is the name I give to that movement of the soul to delight in God for his own sake, and in self and neighbour for God's sake." He who lacks this, however many things he does which are in themselves good, he does them in vain. That is why the Apostle says, *If I speak with the tongues of men*, etc. Charity led the Son of God to the wood of the Cross. In the Canticles it says:

*Love is as strong as death*, [Cant 8.6]

and St Bernard[4] comments on this passage, "O charity, how strong is your bond! Even

the Lord was bound by you!" So take your son, and offer him on the altar of Jesus Christ’s Passion, whose bitter gall will enlighten you, and you will hear the words, "*Receive thy sight, thy faith hath saved thee*;" that is, it has enlightened you.

11. Alternatively. Tobias had his sight restored by the fish’s gall. Though the fish’s flesh is tasty, its gall is bitter; and if the gall is sprinkled on the flesh, it all becomes bitter. The ‘flesh’ of the fish represents the pleasure of lust; the gall hidden within it is the bitterness of eternal death. So Job, in a similar sense but in different words, says:

*The root of junipers was their food*. [Job 30.4]

The root of the juniper is sweet and edible, but its leaves are thorny. In the same way the pleasure of lust seems sweet here and now, but in the end it will produce the sharp thorn of everlasting death. *Take the entrails of the fish*: Consider the pleasures of sin, and how vile they are. *Take out the gall*: Pay attention to the punishment due to sin, how unending it is and how it can turn all the pleasure of your flesh to bitterness.

**(A sermon for prelates of the Church: *The lips of the priest*.)**

12. The third blind man is the ‘Angel of Laodicea’, who was enlightened by eye-salve. Laodicea means ‘a people dear to the Lord’, and it represents Holy Church, for love of which the Lord shed his blood, and from which he chose a royal priesthood, as once he did from the tribe of Judah. The ‘angel of Laodicea’ is the bishop set over the Church. He is rightly called ‘Angel’ because of the dignity of his office. The prophet Malachi says:

*The lips of the priest shall keep knowledge,*

*and they shall seek the Law at his mouth;*

*because he is the angel of the Lord of Hosts*. [Mal 2.7]

Five points are to be noticed in this text, all very necessary to the bishop or Church leader. They are: life, good repute, knowledge, an abundance of charity and the vestment of purity. The ‘lips’ of a priest are two-fold: his life and his reputation. These preserve knowledge, so that he may keep safe what he knows and what he preaches. His good life benefits himself, and his reputation benefits his neighbour. From the two lips comes forth knowledge in fruitful preaching. If these three elements are eminent in the bishop, those subject to him will seek the Law of charity from his mouth. As the Apostle says;

*bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the Law of Christ*, [Gal 6.2]

which is charity. Christ bore the burden of our sins from charity alone, in his body on the Cross

[cf. 1Pt 2.24]. The Law is charity, and those under a superior will look for and expect it first in his actions, so that afterwards they may get comfort and profit from his words. St Luke tells us in Acts:

*Jesus began to do and to teach*, [Acts 1.1]

and in his Gospel:

*He was powerful in deed and in word*. [Lk 24.19]

13. There follows: *Because he is the angel of the Lord of Hosts*. See the robe of inner purity! St Jerome[4] teaches that, "To live in the body, and yet to transcend the body, is the characteristic of heavenly nature, not human nature." The Lord rebukes the ‘Angel of Laodicea’, the bishop of that Church, for lacking these five virtues:

*Thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked*.

You are wretched in your life, miserable in your reputation, blind in your knowledge, poor in charity and naked as regards the robe of purity. But the Lord knows how to cure a disease by its opposite. When he takes away, he also bestows. When he stings, he applies soothing ointment. So he counsels the blind bishop of Laodicea like this:

> *I counsel thee to buy of me gold, fire-tried, that thou mayest be made rich, and mayest be clothed in white garments; and that the shame of thy nakedness may not appear. And anoint thy eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see*.

I counsel you to buy from me, not from the world, with the coin of good-will; to buy the gold of a virtuous life rather than the base metal of sin, gold fire-tried by charity against your need and poverty, proved by the bellows of good repute as against the stench of your bad name. Be clothed in white garments to take away the exposure of your foul deeds, and anoint your eyes with eye-salve as a remedy for the blindness of folly.

**(A sermon on the Passion of Christ: *He will be given up to the Gentiles*, etc.)**

14. This eye-salve, with which the soul’s eyes are enlightened, is made up of five aspects of our Lord’s Passion, like five herbs. They are mentioned in today’s Gospel:

> *He will be given up to the Gentiles and mocked, beaten and spat upon; and after they have scourged him they will kill him*.

Alas, alas! He who is the liberty of captives is made a prisoner. He who is the Glory of the angels is mocked. The God of all is scourged. The spotless mirror of the eternal Light

is spat upon [cf. Wisd 7.26]. The Life of mortals is killed. What is there left for us poor wretches to do but *go and die with him*? [cf. Jn 11.16] Draw us forth from the mire, Lord Jesus, with the hook of your Cross; so that we may run, not to your sweetness [cf. Cant 1.3], but to the bitterness of your Passion. Prepare yourself an eye-salve, my soul, and give yourself to bitter weeping over the death of the Only-begotten [cf. Jer 6.26], over the Passion of the Crucified! The innocent Lord is betrayed by the disciple, mocked by Herod, scourged by the Governor, spat on by the Jewish mob and crucified by the soldiers. We will take these briefly in turn.

15. He was betrayed by his own disciple.

*What will you give me, to betray him?* [Mt 26.15]

The shame of it! To set a price on that which is beyond price! Alas! As the verse says, "He is shown forth; God is sold for a worthless coin." O Judas, will you sell God, the Son of God, as if he were a lowly slave, or a dead dog? And will you not even set the price yourself, but leave it to your customers? *What will you give me?* What can they give you? If they gave you Jerusalem, Galilee and Samaria, could they buy Jesus? If they gave you the heavens and all the angels in them, earth and all mankind, the sea and all that is in it: could they pay a price worth the Son of God*, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge lie hid?* [Col 2.3] No! Never!

Can the Creator be bought or sold by a creature? And yet you say, *What will you give me, to betray him to you?* Tell me: how has he injured you, what harm has he done you, for you to say, *I will betray him to you?* What of the humility and voluntary poverty of the incomparable Son of God? What of his kindness and affection? What of his sweet preaching and working of miracles? His tears, so loving, shed over Jerusalem and for the death of Lazarus? What of the privilege that he chose you as an Apostle and familiar friend? Let the remembrance of these things, and others like them, soften your heart and inspire you to mercy, so that you do not say, *I will betray him to you*. Yet how many Judas Iscariots there are today, 'hirelings' according to the meaning of his name, who sell the Truth for the reward of some small temporal advantage, who sell their neighbour with the kiss of flattery, and in the end hang themselves in the pit of eternal damnation.

16. He was mocked by Herod.

*Herod with his army set him at nought and mocked him, putting on him a white garment*.

[Lk 23.11]

The Son of God was spurned by Herod the Fox (*Go, tell that fox*, he said [Lk 13.32]) and his army- he to whom the hosts of angels cry *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth*, whom, as Daniel says, *a thousand thousand serve, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before him* [cf. Dan 7.10]. He mocked him, putting on him a white garment. It is in fact the Father who clothes his Son Jesus Christ in the white garment of

his flesh, clean from every spot of sin, taken from the immaculate Virgin. God the Father glorified him, but Herod despised him. The Father put upon him a white robe, but Herod seeing him thus clad mocked him. The shame of it! It is the same today. Herod means ‘glory skin-deep’, an image of the hypocrite who takes pride in outward appearance, skin-deep; whereas the heavenly King’s daughter (the soul) is *all glorious within* [cf. Ps 44.14]. He spurns and mocks Jesus. He spurns him when he preaches Christ crucified but does not bear his wounds in his own heart. He mocks him when he conceals himself under an outward glory so as to deceive the members of Christ. "The birdcatcher plays a sweet-sounding pipe, so as to deceive the bird."[5] How many Herodians are taken in by outward glory, even today!

17. He was scourged by Pontius Pilate. John tells us that

*Pontius Pilate took Jesus and scourged him*. [Jn 19.1]

Isaiah says:

*When the overflowing scourge shall pass,*

*you shall be trodden down by it.*

*Whensoever it shall pass through,*

*it shall take you away*. [Is 28.18-19]

To prevent that scourge which is eternal death and the power of the devil from treading us down, the God of all, the Son of God, was bound to a pillar like a criminal and cruelly scourged so that his blood ran down on every side.

What meekness of divine love! What patience of the Father’s kindness! How deep and unfathomable the secret of the eternal mind! You beheld your only-begotten Son, who is equal to you, Father, bound to a pillar like a criminal and torn with scourges as if he were a murderer. How could you restrain yourself? Holy Father, we thank you because by the bonds and wounds of your beloved Son we have been set free from the bonds of sin and the scourges of the devil. And yet, the shame of it! Once again Pontius Pilate scourges Jesus Christ. A weak man pretending to be strong, but full of empty words, he is like a man who makes a commitment with good intentions, but then returns to his vomit. With blasphemous mouth and cruel tongue he tears and scourges Christ in his members. With Satan he *goes out from the presence of the Lord* [cf Job 2.7], to run down his former community. He calls this one ‘proud’, and that one ‘greedy’, and to exculpate himself he passes judgement on others, covering up his own faults by blaming everyone else.

18. He was smeared with spittle by the Jews. According to Matthew,

*They spat in his face and fell on him with blows, while others slapped him in the face*.

[Mt 26.67]

Father, the head of your Son Jesus, before whom the archangels tremble, was struck with a reed; and the face on which the angels long to gaze was fouled with the spittle of the Jews. His face was slapped, his beard was pulled, he was struck with blows and his hair was torn. Yet you, O most Merciful, were silent and still. You would rather that one person, however dear to you, should be spat on and struck, than that your whole people should perish. Praise and glory be to you! From the spitting, the smiting and the striking that your Son suffered, you make for us an antidote to drive the poison from our souls.

Another lesson for us is this. The 'face of Jesus Christ' may be understood as the leaders of the Church, who make God known to us and who represent him. Faithless Jews (in other words, perverse subordinates) spit on that face whenever they criticize or speak ill of those leaders. They disobey the Lord who has said:

*Do not speak ill of the leader of your people*. [cf. Acts 23.5; Ex 22.28]

19. He was crucified by the soldiers. St John says:

*When the soldiers had crucified him, they took his garments.* [Jn 19.23]

*O all ye that pass by the way, stay your steps and attend,*

*and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow*. [Lam 1.12]

His disciples fled, his friends and acquaintances drew back, Peter denied him, the Synagogue crowned him with thorns, the soldiers crucified him, the Jews mocked and blasphemed and gave him vinegar and gall to drink. *What sorrow is like to my sorrow?*

*His hands are turned and as of gold, full of hyacinths*, [Cant 5.14]

says the Bride in the Canticles, but now they are fixed with nails. His feet, which once he showed capable of walking on the sea, are fastened to the Cross with nails. His face, which shone like the sun in its splendour, has become pale as death. His beloved eyes, to which no creature is invisible, are closed in death. *What sorrow is like to my sorrow?* In all this, only the Father stands by to support; and into the Father's hands he commits his spirit, saying,

*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit*. [Lk 23.46]

*When he had said this he bowed his head-*

having nowhere else to lay his head-

*and gave up his spirit*. [Jn 19.30]

But alas, alas! Once more the entire mystical Body of Christ, the Church, is crucified and killed! In that Body some form the head, others the hands or feet or trunk. Contemplatives are the head, active religious the hands, holy preachers the feet and all true Christians the trunk. Every day the soldiers (the demons) crucify that Body with their evil suggestions as with nails. Jews, pagans and heretics blaspheme and offer the vinegar and gall of sorrow and persecution to drink. This should not surprise us:

*All who wish to live devotedly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*. [2Tim 3.12]

How apt are the words, *He was betrayed, mocked, scourged, spat on and crucified*. From these five words, as from five most precious herbs, you must make yourself an eye-salve, you Angel of Laodicea. Anoint the eyes of your soul with it, and you will see the light and hear the words: *Receive your sight, your faith has saved you*.

Let us pray, then, dear brethren, and ask straightway for devotion of mind; so that our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave light to the man born blind, to Tobit and to the Angel of Laodicea, may be pleased to illuminate the eyes of our souls with the faith of his Incarnation and with the ointment of his Passion. Thus may we be enabled to see the Son of God himself, the Light of Light, in the splendour of the saints and the brightness of the angels. May he grant this, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] OVID, *Remedia amoris*, 161-162

[2] cf. AUGUSTINE, *De doctrina christiana*, III,10,16; PL 34.72

[3] cf. BERNARD, *Tractatus de charitate*, 1,2,4; PL 184.585-586

[4] Pseudo-JEROME, *De Assumptione* B.M.V. 5; PL 30.126

[5] CATO, *Disticha*, I,27

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

# FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

**(The fourth Gospel, for Lent: *Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit*, which is divided into an allegorical and a moral sermon.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(In the allegorical sermon, first on the three-fold desert, and a sermon on the advent of the Lord: *Send forth, O Lord, the lamb*.)**

1. *Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil*. [Mt 4.1]

We are told in the first book of Kings [1Kg(Sm) 24.1-2] that David dwelt in the wilderness of Engaddi. The name David means ‘strong of hand’, and stands for Jesus Christ who, with his hands fastened to the Cross, did battle with the powers of the air. What wonderful strength, to overcome his enemy with bound hands! He dwelt in the wilderness of Engaddi, which means ‘the eye of temptation’. The eye of temptation is three-fold: first greed, of which Genesis says:

*The woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold; and she took the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave to her husband*. [Gen 3.6]

Second, pride and vainglory, of which Job speaks, in regard to the devil:

*He beholdeth every high thing.*

*He is king over the children of pride*. [Job 41.25]

Third, avarice, of which Zechariah says:

*This is their eye in all the earth*. [Zech 5.6]

In this way Christ dwelt in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights, during which time he sustained from the devil temptations to greed, to vainglory and to avarice.

2. So it says in today’s Gospel, *Jesus was led into the desert*. This desert into which

Jesus was led is also three-fold: first, the womb of the Virgin; second, as in today's Gospel; third, the gibbet of the Cross. Into the first he was led by compassion alone; into the second as an example; into the third by obedience. Of the first, Isaiah says:

*Send forth, O Lord, the lamb, the ruler of the earth,*

*from Petra of the desert, to the mount of the daughter of Sion*. [Is 16.1]

O Lord and Father, send forth a lamb and not a lion, to rule and not to lay waste the earth, from Petra the Rock of the desert (that is, from the Blessed Virgin). She is called a 'rock' because of her firm intention of virginity, whereby she answered the angel,

*How shall this be done, because I know not man*. [Lk 1.34]

This means, 'I am fully resolved not to know'. She is called 'of the desert' because she was infertile, a virgin before, during and after giving birth. 'Send forth,' I repeat, 'to the mountain', to the excellence of the daughter of Sion, the Church which is the daughter of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Of the second desert Matthew says: *Jesus was led into the desert*.

Of the third, John the Baptist says in St John's Gospel:

*I am a voice crying in the desert*. [Jn 1.23]

John was a voice, because just as a voice is prior to a word, so he went before the Son of God. I am the voice of Christ, crying in the desert of the wood of the Cross:

*Father, into thy hands*, etc. [Lk 23.46]

In this desert all was thorny, and there was no human help.

**(A sermon on the cursed three: *Joab took three lances*.)**

3. Let us say, then: *Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert*. If we ask by whom he was led, St Luke gives us the answer in the clearest way:

*Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from the Jordan*

*and was led by the Spirit into the desert*. [Lk 4.1]

He was led by the Spirit that filled him, of which Isaiah says:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me*. [Is 61.1]

He was led by the Spirit whereby he was *anointed above his fellows* [cf. Heb 1.10] into the desert, to be tempted by the devil. The Son of God, our Zerubbabel ('Master of Babylon'), came to restore a world that had been disordered by sin, came like a physician to heal the sick. It was therefore fitting for him to 'cure opposites by opposites', as the saying is, just as by medical skill chills are cured by warmth, and fevers by cooling.

The sin of Adam was the destruction and the weakening of the human race. It consisted in three things: greed, vainglory and avarice. A poet has said, "Greed, vainglory and desire conquered old Adam." These three things are implicit in Genesis:

*The serpent said to the woman... In what day soever you shall eat thereof,*

*your eyes shall be opened* (greed);

*and you shall be as gods* (vainglory),

*knowing good and evil* (avarice). [Gen 3.4,5]

These were like three spears with which Adam and all his children were killed, just as in the second book of Kings,

*Joab took three lances in his hand, and thrust them into the heart of Absalom*. [2Kg(Sm) 18.14]

Joab means 'enemy', so he well represents the devil, the enemy of the human race. With the hand of a lying promise he took three lances- greed, vainglory and avarice- and thrust them into man's heart, the very source of his warmth and life. As Solomon says, *Life issueth from the heart* [Prov 4.23]. In this way he extinguished the fire of divine love, and took life away altogether from the heart of Absalom ('the father's peace'), Adam who was placed in the garden of peace and delight to keep for ever the peace of the Father by obeying him. But after Adam refused to obey God the Father, he lost this peace and the devil thrust those three lances into his heart, and took away his life altogether.

4. The Son of God came at the acceptable time, and being obedient to God the Father he restored what was lost, curing opposites by opposites. Adam was placed in Paradise, and there, seeking pleasure, he fell. Jesus was led into the desert, and there, by constant fasting, he overcame the devil. Look at the **concordance** between the two temptations, in Genesis and in Matthew:

*The serpent said... In what day soever you shall eat...*

*And the tempter coming said to him: If thou be the Son of God,*

*command that these stones be made bread*. [Mt 4.3]

This is the temptation of greed.

And: *You shall be as gods*...

*Then the devil took him up into the holy city*

*and set him upon the pinnacle of the temple*. [Mt 4.5]

This is the temptation of vainglory.

And: ...*knowing good and evil.*

*Again the devil took him up into a very high mountain*

*and shewed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them.*

*And said to him: All these will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me*. [Mt 4.8-9]

Being a liar, he told a lie; but this is the temptation of avarice. Wisdom however, which always acts wisely, overcame the three-fold temptation of the devil by the three-fold authority of Deuteronomy.

When the devil tempted him to greed, Jesus replied:

*Man does not live on bread alone*, [Mt 4.4; cf. Dt 8.3]

as if to say, just as the outward man lives on material bread, so the inward man lives on heavenly bread, the word of God. The Son is called the Word of God, the Wisdom

*which proceedeth from the mouth of the Most High*. [Ecclus 24.5]

Wisdom or sapience is a kind of savouring or taste, and so the bread of the soul is this taste for wisdom, this savouring of the good things of the Lord, to

*taste and see how sweet is the Lord*. [Ps 33.9]

The Book of Wisdom says of this bread:

*Thou gavest them bread from heaven,*

*having in it all that is delicious and the sweetness of every taste*.[Wisd 16.20]

This is what is meant by the words, *But in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God*. *Every word*; because the word and wisdom of God has *the sweetness of every taste*, and its saviour renders tasteless the delights of greed. Because Adam refused this bread, he fell into the temptation of greed; so the words are appropriate, *Not by bread alone*, etc.

When the devil tempted him to vainglory, Jesus answered:

*Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*. [Mt 4.7; cf. Dt 6.16]

Jesus Christ is Lord in creation and God in eternity. The devil tempted him when he urged him, who was the creator of the temple, to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple; and promised the help of the angels to the God of all the heavenly powers! *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*. Adam too tempted the Lord God, when he disobeyed the command of his Lord and God, and too easily believed the false promise, *You will be as gods*. What vainglory, to think that one could become God! What a wretched man! Because of your stupidity in setting yourself above your proper state, you fell below it in miserable ruin. That is why you should not tempt the Lord your God!

When the devil tempted Jesus to avarice, he replied:

*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and serve him alone*. [Mt 4.10; cf. Dt 6.13; 10.20]

All those who love money or worldly glory are bowing down to worship the devil. For our sakes, Jesus entered the womb of the Virgin and bore the shame of the Cross. Taught by his example, let us go into the desert of penitence. With his help let us resist the wind of vainglory and the fire of avarice. Let us adore him whom the archangels adore. Let us serve him whom the angels serve, who is blessed, glorious and to be praised, most high for ever and ever. And let every creature say: Amen!

[SECOND PROLOGUE]

**(In the moral sermon, first a sermon for enclosed religious: *There were given to the woman two wings*; and on the nature of the eagle and the property of the hawk.)**

1. *Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit*. [Mt 4.1]

We read in the Apocalypse:

*And there were given to the woman two wings of a great eagle,*

*that she might fly into the desert*. [Apoc 12.14]

The woman represents the penitent soul, of which the Lord says in John:

*A woman, when she is in labour, has sorrow*, [Jn 16.21]

that is, the soul, confessing sin conceived in pleasure, has sorrow- and so she should! To this woman are given the two wings of an eagle. The eagle is noted for its sharp sight and sharp beak, and it represents the just man. The eagle has the keenest vision, and when with age its beak grows blunt it sharpens it on a stone and so renews it. In like manner the just man, by keenness of inward contemplation, is able to gaze on the brightness of the true sun; and when his 'beak'- the affection of his mind- has been blunted by sin, he straightway resorts to the stone of confession to sharpen it, and so renews his youth in grace. To this effect the Psalmist says:

*Thy youth shall be renewed like the eagles.* [Ps 102.5]

This eagle has two wings, love and the fear of God, concerning which the Lord said to Job:

*Doth the hawk wax feathered by wisdom,*

*spreading his wings to the south?* [Job 39.26]

The eagle and the hawk in this passage stand for the just man. Take note of two characteristics of the hawk: it catches its prey in its claws, and only catches a bird in flight. Similarly the just man should take hold with the claws of his affection, but only of the good that 'flies', not caring for what is on the earth! By God's wisdom he preens his feathers, the pure thoughts of the just man which, as he savours God's wisdom, grow in an orderly way in his mind. When you savour the things of God you as it were 'preen your feathers', putting forth good thoughts as you enjoy the sweetness of that wisdom. The hawk spreads his wings (love and divine fear) to the south, that is to Jesus Christ who *comes from the south* [cf. Hab 3.3] to send forth the heat that nourishes, and to pour into them the grace that keeps them. These two wings are given to the woman, the penitent soul, so that she may be lifted up by them from earthly things, and fly into the desert of penitence, the desert spoken of in this Sunday's Gospel, *Jesus was led into the desert*.

2. This Sunday the Introit of the Mass is

*He shall call upon me and I will hear him*, [Ps 90.15-16]

and the Epistle is taken from St Paul to the Corinthians,

*We beseech you, do not receive the grace of God in vain*, [2Cor 6.1-10]

because "Days of penitence have come upon us, to redeem sins and save souls."[1] So for God's praise and the benefit of our souls, we shall treat of penitence, which consists in three things: contrition of heart, confession of the lips and satisfaction in deed; and their three opposites, greed, vainglory and avarice. These six things are to be found in today's Gospel.

**(A sermon on contrition of heart: *With a vehement wind*; and: *A sacrifice to God*.)**

3. Let us say, then: *Jesus was led into the desert*.

Jesus said:

*I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also*. [Jn 13.15]

What did Jesus do? He was led into the desert by the Spirit. I pray you, then, who believe in Jesus and hope for salvation, to be led by the spirit of contrition into the desert of confession, so that you may perfectly fulfil the forty days of satisfaction. Contrition of heart, be it noted, may be called a spirit, wind or breath. So David says,

*With a vehement wind thou shalt break in pieces the ships of Tharsis*. [Ps 47.8]

Tharsis is 'the exploration of joy'; and the 'ships of Tharsis' are minds of worldly folk who are blown along through the seas of this world, with the sail of carnal desire and the wind of vainglory, to explore the joy of worldly prosperity. With the strong wind of contrition the Lord breaks the ships of Tharsis, these worldly minds, so that when they are broken they will look for true joy, not that which is empty. The spirit of contrition is called 'vehement' for two reasons: it is a 'driving' wind that drives the mind to higher things, and which drives away eternal woe. Genesis says of it:

*He breathed into his face the breath of life*. [Gen 2.7]

The Lord breathes the breath of life, contrition of heart, into the face of the soul when he impresses upon it his own image and likeness, which has been soiled by sin, and renews it.

4. The Psalmist shows what contrition should be like when he says:

*A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit;*

*a contrite and humbled heart, O God, thou wilt not despise*. [Ps 50.19]

In this verse there are four things to note: compunction of the spirit afflicted for its sins; the reconciliation of the sinner; the universal contrition of all sinners; the continued humbling of the contrite sinner. So he says that the *spirit* of a penitent which is *afflicted* and pricked for sins by so many trials is a *sacrifice to God*. It makes peace between God and that sinner, and reconciles the sinner to God; and because sorrow for sin should be all-embracing, the words *a contrite heart* are added.

The word used means, literally, not just ‘bruised’ but ‘broken’. Both these words should be true of the sinner. His heart should be bruised by the hammer of contrition and split open by the sword of sorrow, divided into enough pieces to cover each and every mortal sin, weeping and mourning over them. The sinner should grieve over one mortal sin he has committed, more than for the loss of the whole world and everything in it if he were their lord. By mortal sin he has lost the Son of God, who is mightier, dearer and more precious than all creatures; so he should have a contrite heart, broken altogether, to be sorry for every single thing he has done, neglected or forgotten.

The completion of every good action is humility, so in the fourth and last place we hear that God will not despise a humbled heart. Indeed, as Isaiah says:

*The High and the Eminent that inhabiteth eternity...*

*dwelleth with a contrite and humble spirit,*

*to revive the spirit of the humble*

*and to revive the heart of the contrite*. [Is 57.16]

How great is the kindness of God! How great is the dignity of the penitent! He who lives in eternity dwells in the heart of the humble and in the soul of the penitent! It is the mark of a truly contrite heart that it humbles itself in everything, reckoning itself no more than *a dead dog and a mere flea* [cf. 1Kg(Sm) 24.15].

**(A sermon for priests, and how they should conceal confession: "*Confession should be uninhabitable*"; and: *Take heed you go not up into the mount*.)**

5. So by this spirit of contrition the penitent is led into the desert of confession; and it is well called a desert for three reasons. A desert is a land which is uninhabitable, which is full of wild beasts, and which is horrible and fearful. This in literal truth was the kind of desert in which Jesus Christ lived for forty days and forty nights. In the same way, confession should be ‘uninhabited’, in the sense that it should be private and secret, concealed from anyone else’s knowledge, kept in the memory of the confessor alone under an inviolable seal, and hidden from human awareness. Even if every person in the world knew the sin of the sinner confessing to you, nonetheless you should conceal it and lock it away with the key of everlasting silence.

Truly they are the children of the devil, accursed by the living and true God, cast out from the Church Triumphant and excommunicate from the Church Militant, to be deposed from every office and benefice, who (not by word, which would be worse than murder) even by sign or in any way at all, hidden or open, whether to blame or even to praise, reveal or manifest a confession. I dare to say that whoever reveals a confession sins more gravely than the traitor Judas, who sold Jesus Christ the Son of God to the Jews. I make my confession to a man, but not simply as to a man, but as to God. The Lord says in Isaiah:

*My secret to myself! My secret to myself!* [Is 24.16]

and shall not man, born of earth, seal up the secret of confession in the depths of his heart?

6. So it is appropriate that confession should be called an uninhabited and inaccessible land, because the secret of confession should be disclosed to nobody. The Lord warns and commands in Exodus:

*Take heed you go not up into the mount, and that ye touch not the borders thereof. Everyone that toucheth the mount dying he shall die. No hands shall touch him, but he shall be stoned to death, or shall be shot through with arrows. Whether it be a beast or a man, he shall not live*. [Ex 19.12-13]

Mount Sinai (‘measure’) here stands for confession, which is called a ‘mount’ because of its excellence, namely the remission of sin. What could be more excellent or lofty than the remission of sin? And it is called ‘measure’ because of the correspondence between that confession and the guilt of sin. The sinner should measure out his confession so that it corresponds exactly to his guilt, neither leaving anything out for shame or fear, nor adding anything through imagined humility, more than is strictly true. It is not right to say what is untrue, for humility’s sake.

Beware then, you confessors, you priests, lest you go up onto that mountain! To ‘go up the mountain’ would be to disclose the secret of confession. You are bidden not merely not to go up, but not even to touch the borders. The borders of the mountain are the circumstances of confession, which no-one should touch by word, sign, or in any way at all. For shame! There are those who are afraid to go up the mountain, but are not afraid to touch its borders by disclosing the circumstances of sin by word or sign. Let these unhappy men hear their death sentence: *Everyone that toucheth the mountain, dying he shall die*, says the Lord. And by what death, Lord? The hand of the secular power shall not touch them, to hang them like a thief or a murderer. Maybe that would be a lesser punishment. They will be stoned with the stones of the harshest excommunication, and shot through with the arrows of eternal damnation. Whether he be a ‘beast’ (a simple priest) or a ‘man’ (an educated and knowledgeable priest) he shall in no wise live. Another interpretation would be, whether a ‘beast’ (a layman or lesser cleric to whom one may confess in case of necessity) or a ‘man’ (a priest of the Church), he shall not

live for evermore because he has gone onto the mountain or touched its borders. So it is appropriate to call confession an uninhabited and inaccessible land!

**(A sermon on the seven vices, and the properties of the ostrich, the ass and the hedgehog: It shall be a habitation of dragons.)**

7. Again, confession may be called a 'desert' inasmuch as it is full of wild beasts. What these beasts are, with which confession should abound, we shall see. These beasts are mortal sins, which ravage and wound the soul. Isaiah, speaking of faithless Judah (the sinful soul) says:

*It shall be the habitation of dragons*

*and the pasture of ostriches.*

*And demons and monsters shall meet,*

*and the hairy ones shall cry out to one another.*

*There hath the lamia lain down and found rest for herself.*

*There hath the ericius had its hole and brought up its young ones,*

*and hath dug round about and cherished them in the shadow thereof*. [Is 34.13-15]

In this text seven kinds of beast are mentioned: the dragon, the ostrich, the "monster" (a hybrid of ass and ox), the hairy one, the lamia and the ericius. By these beasts we are to understand seven kinds of sin, which should all and individually be fully disclosed in confession, just as they were committed by the consent of the mind and the effect of the deed. This is the meaning of*, It shall be the habitation of dragons*, etc.

The 'dragon' is the poisonous malice of hatred and detraction;

The 'ostrich' is the deceitfulness of hypocrisy;

the 'ass' is lust;

the 'ox' is pride;

the 'hairy beast' is avarice and usury;

the 'lamia' is heresy and lack of faith;

the ‘ericius’ (hedgehog) is the crafty excusing of the sinner.

8. Let us say, then: *It shall be the habitation of dragons*.

The mind or conscience of the sinner is the habitation of dragons by the poison of hatred and detraction. It says in the Song of Moses:

*Their wine is the gall of dragons, and the venom of asps, which is incurable*. [Dt 32.33]

The hate and detraction of sinners is like a wine that inebriates the mind, and intoxicates those who listen to it. It is the gall of dragons and the incurable venom of asps. As Solomon says in Ecclesiastes,

*If a serpent bite in silence, he is nothing better that backbiteth in secret*. [Eccles 10.11]

It is incurable because, as Ecclesiasticus says,

*The stroke of a whip maketh a blue mark;*

*but the stroke of the tongue will break the bones*. [Ecclus 28.21]

The mark of a whip is only a bruise on the outside of the body, but the wound made by a critical tongue breaks the bones of inner virtue- so, yes, it is the habitation of dragons.

9. There follows: *and the pasture of ostriches*.

The ostrich has wings, but it cannot fly because of the size of its body. Likewise, the hypocrite is weighed down by love of earthly things, yet pretends to be a hawk who, with wings of false religion, takes flight in contemplation. Job says:

*The wing of the ostrich is like the wing of the heron and of the hawk*. [Job 39.13]

The ‘pasture of ostriches’ is in the mind of a false religious; and ‘pasture’ is a most apt word, because the hypocrite who is praised for his hawk-like wings feeds on this praise. He behaves like a peacock which, when children praise it, shows off the glory of its plumage, making a great wheel of its tail. But when it turns round, it shows the unsightliness of its backside! Just so the hypocrite, when he is praised, shows off the feathers of his apparent holiness, and makes a ‘wheel’ of his devout behaviour. He says, "I have done this, and that; I have begun, and carried through to completion." And as he turns himself about he only shows off his baseness. The fool causes disgust by the very things he tries to please with.

10. *And demons and monsters shall meet*.

The word used, '*onocentaur*', comes from the Greek for 'ass' and 'ox'. The 'ass' stands for the lustful person. It is stupid, lazy and timid. In the same way the lustful person is stupid, having lost the true wisdom which fills the wise and sober man, and which drives out the lust of the flesh which beguiles a man and makes him dull-witted. He is also lazy, for, as the Poet[2] says:

"If you ask why Aegisthus became an adulterer,

the reason is clear: he had nothing better to do!"

He is also timid, like the ass as described in Natural History: An animal which has a large heart is timid, while that which has a smaller one is brave. What happens is this: when such an animal is afraid, the heat of the heart is too little to fill it. A little heat in a large heart grows weaker, and the blood becomes cooler. Hares, deer, asses and mice have large hearts. Just as a little heat will warm a large house less than a small one, so is the heat in these. The lustful man has a large heart for thinking about and committing wicked and lustful actions, but he has little or no heat from the love of the Holy Spirit. That is why he is timid and unstable, and *inconstant in all his ways* [cf. Jas 1.8].

The 'bull' means the proud man. The Lord complains in the Psalm:

*Fat bulls have surrounded me*. [Ps 21.13]

'Fat bulls' are proud men in their worldly wealth. They have surrounded me (says our Lord) like the Jews who repeatedly called for me to be crucified. At the hour of death the demons meet the 'onocentaur', the monster combining lust and pride, so as to receive such sinners as they leave this world, and drag them away with them to eternal punishment. So it is that those who incited the sin now inflict the torment that punishes it.

11. There follows: *and the hairy ones cry one to another*.

The 'hairy ones' are the avaricious and usurious. Their 'pelt' is pelf! Avarice cries out for usury, and usury for avarice. The one invites the other. For shame! The cry of these 'hairy ones' has already filled the whole world. Hairy Esau is their model. His name means 'oak'. The avaricious and usurious are 'hairy' in taking, but 'oakish' (hard and inflexible) in paying back.

12. *There hath the lamia lain down and found rest for herself*.

The 'lamia' was supposed to be a beast with a human face, but the rear part of an animal. It represents heretics who, in order more easily to deceive, make a pretence of a human appearance and smooth words. Jeremiah says of them, in Lamentations:

*Lamias have exposed their breast and suckled their young*. [Lam 4.3]

Heretics ‘expose their breast’ when they promote their sect; and they ‘suckle their young’ when they foster the faithlessness of those who believe them. The word used means ‘whelps’ rather than ‘children’, because like uneducated folk, cobblers and tanners, they know nothing except to cry out against the Church, and to curse Catholics who belong to it.

13. There follows: *There the ericius has its hole*.

The hedgehog is all prickly, and if anyone tries to catch it, it rolls itself up into a ball in the hand of the one holding it. It has its head and mouth underneath, and five teeth in its mouth. The hedgehog is the obstinate sinner, clad all around with the spines of sin. If you try to rebuke him for the sins he has committed, immediately he gets prickly and hides his guilt with excuses. His head and mouth (that is, his mind and speech) are underneath. While excusing the wicked things he has done, the sinner is just turning his mind and speech to earthly things below. The five teeth in his mouth are the five kinds of excuse which a stubborn man uses. When he is rebuked, he blames ignorance, bad luck, the devil’s tempting, the weakness of the flesh or the provocation of other people. In this way, as Isaiah says, he ‘nourishes his young’, the impulses of his mind, and digs round them and hides them in the shadow of excuses.

**(A sermon for those confessing, how they should confess their sins and the circumstances of them: *Take a harp*.)**

14. These seven beasts (their number includes all kinds of sins) should appear abundantly and fully in the desert of our confession, so that nothing is hidden from the priest, or glossed over, but everything is confessed to the last detail and circumstance. As the Lord says through Isaiah:

*After seventy years there shall be unto Tyre as the song of a harlot.*

*Take a harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten:*

*sing well, sing many a song, that thou mayst be remembered*. [Is 23.15-16]

The seventy-fold and seven-fold number here stands for all sins universally. So it is said that the Lord cast out seven demons from Magdalene, that is, all vices. So by the seventy years and seven beasts we understand all vices. And so Isaiah says, *After seventy years*, that is, after committing all crimes, *unto Tyre* (meaning ‘a narrow place’, the soul hemmed in by sins) *there shall be a song*, the confession of sins. After committing all crimes, there is no remedy left for the unhappy soul but the confession of sins which is ‘the second plank after shipwreck’. The soul is addressed as ‘harlot’ because she has put away her true spouse, Jesus Christ, and clung to the adulterous devil; and unless she is converted she will be given to eternal oblivion. So, *Take a harp*! Note that the word ‘take’ implies a prompt will to confess, not forced or extorted; while

the ‘harp’ is the confession of every sin and its circumstances. *Take a harp*, then, to confess voluntarily;

*Confess whilst thou art alive and in health*. [Ecclus 17.27]

15. Just as the strings are drawn out in a harp, so the circumstances of sin must be drawn out in confession- who, what, where, with whose help, how often, why, how and when. A confessor should distinguish all these, and whether dealing with a man or a woman should enquire discreetly and carefully.

‘Who?’: whether married or single, lay-person or cleric, rich or poor, whether occupying any office or dignity, whether free or slave, of what religious order or congregation.

‘What?’: how serious the sin, and of what kind. For instance, [if sexual sin,] was it a case of simple fornication between two unmarried people? Was the woman a hired prostitute? Was it adultery? Was it incest, between those related by blood or marriage? If a man seduces a virgin, he sins particularly grievously, because he opens the door of sin for her, and so becomes liable to share the guilt of any sins she commits afterwards (unless he provides properly for her in a place where she can do penance, or unless he arranges a marriage for her, if he can.) Was it a sin against nature, which includes every case where seed is spilt other than in a woman’s vagina. These things should only be asked about very cautiously and indirectly. Or was it a case of murder? Was this by thought, word or actual deed? Was it a sacrilege, a robbery or theft? From whom? And was it openly or in secret? Was it usury? In what way? "To take any return over and above the principal is called usury." Was it perjury? False witness? How was it done? Was it pride? There are three sorts: refusal of obedience to a superior, refusal to tolerate an equal, and contempt for an inferior. All this we must confess.

‘Where?’: in a church (consecrated or not), or near a church; in a cemetery where the faithful are buried; or in any place dedicated to prayer- was sin committed here, or something unlawful spoken of?

‘With whose help?’: with whose help or advice did he sin, or cause others to sin? With a few companions, or many? Were they aware of the sin? Did he commit sin because money was offered or taken?

‘How often?’: He should confess how many times he sinned (at least approximately); frequently or infrequently; whether he was in a state of sin a long or a short time; whether he often sinned again after confession.

‘Why?’: did he give mental consent or do wrong even before temptation? Did he in any way do violence to nature, to accomplish the sin, and thus offend in the most serious way?

‘How?’: was the sin committed in an unusual or unbecoming way (by unlawful touching,

for instance) and the like?

‘When?’: in a time of fasting, or on a saint’s day; was the offence committed at a time he should have been in church? How old was he when he committed this or that sin?

All these circumstances, and similar ones, can add greatly to the seriousness of sin, and hurt the soul of the sinner. They should all be laid bare in confession. These are the strings, drawn out in the harp of confession, of which we are bidden, *Take a harp*.

16. There follows: *Go about the city*. The city is human life, which he must ‘go about’ in terms of time and age, sin and manner of sin, place and the persons with whom he consorted, and whom by his bad example, by word or deed, he caused to sin; or whom, if they were sinning, he failed to draw back from sin. As we have said, all these things must be confessed nakedly and openly, after the manner of the Psalmist, who said:

*I have gone around and sacrificed in his tabernacle the sacrifice of vociferation*. [Ps 26.6]

I have gone round my whole life, like a good soldier who goes round his camp, lest there be any gap whereby enemies may get in. And I have sacrificed in his tabernacle, the Church, before his priest, the sacrifice of vociferation (confession) which is aptly so-called because the sinner should confess clearly and distinctly, not with lowered voice and mumbling. Well-expressed, *Go about the city*!

17. There follows: *Sing well*, accusing yourself and not the devil, fate or someone else. *Sing well*, confessing all your sins to a single priest, not sharing them out among several. Maybe you would like my advice about the following case: you say, "I made a general confession of all my sins to one priest, but later I fell again into mortal sin. Must I confess all my sins again?" My advice, sound, salutary and good for your soul, is this: As often as you go to a new confessor, confess as if you had never confessed before. But if you go to someone who knows your conscience, and to whom you have made a general confession, you need only mention the sins you have committed since, or which you had forgotten. *Sing well*, then, sing many a song, confessing your sins again and again. Why? So that you may be remembered before God and his angels, and so that he may forgive your sins, pour his grace into you and confer eternal glory on you.

**(A sermon on confession: *How terrible is this place*.)**

18. Here, then, are the beasts with which the desert of your confession should abound. Sins and their circumstances should appear naked and clear in confession, and thus the desert of confession will be horrible and fearful. To whom? To the unclean spirits! We read in Genesis:

*How terrible is this place! This is no other than the house of God and the gate of heaven*. [Gen 28.17]

The place of confession, and indeed confession itself, is terrible to the unclean spirits. Job says:

*As overflowing waters, so is my roaring*. [Job 3.24]

When the lion roars, all other beasts stand still. Overflowing waters uproot whatever stands in their path. The roar of the lion is the confession of the penitent, of whom the Psalmist says:

*I roared with the groaning of my heart*, [Ps 37.9]

because from the groaning of the heart should go forth the roaring of confession. When the evil spirits hear it, they are terrified and do not dare to tempt. The overflowing waters are the tears of the contrite, which totally dissolve and uproot whatever the evil spirits are plotting against these penitent tears.

Confession is also called ‘the house of God’, on account of the reconciliation of the sinner. In confession, the sinner is reconciled to God, like a son to his father when he is received back into his father’s house. You can read in Luke how when the elder brother drew near to the house, in which the penitent son was feasting with his father, he heard music and song. Note the three things that were in the house: feasting, music and song. Just so there should be three things in the house of confession, where the sinner is received when he returns from the region of deceit: the feasting of contrition, the music of confession and the song of amendment. Just as you accuse yourself of your sins, so also you should take care to amend yourself. Hear the sweet music:

*I acknowledge my iniquity, and my sin is ever before me*. [Ps 50.5]

Hear the choir singing in response,

*I am ready for scourges, and my sorrow is continually before me*. [Ps 37.18]

How many people make the sweet music of confession, yet do nothing to amend themselves!

19. Alternatively: if the music of weeping and bitter compunction resounds in the house of confession, the choir of divine mercy will respond immediately, forgiving the sin. This is the promise made in the Introit of today’s Mass:

*He shall cry to me and I will hear him:*

*I am with him in tribulation:*

*I will deliver him, and I will glorify him.*

*I will fill him with length of days:*

*and I will shew him my salvation*. [Ps 90.15-16]

Four things are promised to the penitent:

*He shall cry to me*, that I may forgive his sin; and I will hear him and will pour my grace on him;

*I will deliver him* from the four things mentioned in this Sunday's Tract:

*The terror of the night;*

*the arrow that flieth in the day;*

*the business that walketh about in the dark;*

*invasion, or the noon-day devil*. [Ps 90.5-6]

The terror of the night is the hidden temptation of the devil; the flying arrow is his open assault; the business walking in darkness is the falseness of hypocrites; and the noon-day devil is the burning lust of the flesh. From all these the Lord will deliver the true penitent. *I will glorify him* in the day of judgement with the glory of a two-fold robe.*I will fill him with length of days* in the endlessness of eternal life.

Confession is also called 'the gate of heaven'. Truly, truly it is the gate of heaven! Truly it is the gate of paradise! Through it, as through a gate, the penitent is led in to kiss the feet of divine mercy; to be raised up to kiss the hands of heavenly grace; and to be accepted with the kiss on the mouth of fatherly reconciliation. O house of God! O gate of heaven! O confession of sin! Blessed is he who dwells in you! Blessed is he who enters by you! Blessed is he who humbles himself in you! My beloved brothers, be humbled and enter by the gate of confession. As you have been taught, confess your sins and their circumstances, because *now is the acceptable time* for confession, *now is the day of salvation* for making amends [cf. 2Cor 6.2]. This is what is meant by, *When he had fasted forty days and forty nights*.

**(A sermon on the forty-day fast: *And when he had fasted forty days*; and: *The scouts sent by Moses*.)**

20. The forty-day fast of Jesus Christ teaches us how we may make satisfaction for our sins, and how we may work so as not to receive the grace of God in vain. As the Apostle says in today's Epistle:

*We exhort you that you receive not the grace of God in vain. For he* (i.e. the Lord, in Isaiah) *saith: In an accepted time have I heard thee and in the day of salvation I have helped thee. Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation*. [2Cor 6.1-2; Is 49.8]

He receives the grace of God in vain, who does not live according to the grace he has been given. He receives the grace of God in vain, who imagines that the grace freely given him is due to his own merits; he receives in vain, who after confessing his guilt in the acceptable time, the day of salvation, refuses to do penance for his sins.

Behold, then: *now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation* given us to promote our salvation. St Bernard[3] says, "No time is more precious; but, alas, today nothing is valued less! The days of salvation pass by, and no-one thinks about it, no-one even makes the excuse that the day for him to perish is never going to come. Like the hair of your head, not a moment of time is going to perish." And Seneca[4] says, "Even if there were much time to spare, it should still be used carefully; what is to be done, then, in such pressing danger?" And Ecclesiasticus: *Son, observe the time* [Ecclus 4.23] as if it were sacred.

Let us do penance in these holy forty days. The number forty is the product of four and ten. God the Creator of all created body and soul, and bestowed a four and a ten on each. The body is made up of the four elements, and is ruled and controlled by ten senses, as though by ten princes, namely: two eyes, two ears, smell, taste, two hands and two feet. God gave the soul four principal virtues- prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance- and the ten Commandments. These are:

*Hear, O Israel: the Lord thy God is One;*

*Thou shalt not take the name of thy God in vain;*

*Remember to keep holy the sabbath day*. [Dt 6.4; Ex 20.7,8]

These three, which concern the love of God, were written on the first tablet. The other seven, which concern the love of neighbour, were on the second:

*Honour thy father and thy mother;*

*Thou shalt not kill;*

*Thou shalt not commit adultery;*

*Thou shalt not steal;*

*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour;*

*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbours house;*

*Thou shalt not desire his wife, nor his servant, nor his maid, nor his ox, nor his ass,*

*nor anything that is his*. [Ex 20.12-17]

Because every day we sin against the four virtues and the ten commandments, in this mortal body made up of the four elements and ruled by ten senses, we should make satisfaction to the Lord by the fast of forty days.

21. As to how this is to be done, we are told in the Book of Numbers that the spies sent out by Moses and the children of Israel went about the Land of Canaan in forty days. ‘Canaan’ means ‘business’, or ‘humble’. The Land of Canaan is our body, in which we do business, exchanging by a happy trade earthly things for eternal, and transitory things for what is lasting, and always in humility of heart. Regarding this business, Proverbs says of the valiant woman:

*She hath tasted and seen that her traffic is good*. [Prov 31.18]

It says two things: that she tastes and that she sees. The ‘valiant woman’, the soul, ‘tastes’ when with the healthy palate of the mind she experiences the sweetness of heavenly glory, for love of which she despises the kingdom of the world and all worldly adornments. So, as time goes by, with the eye of enlightened reason she may see and understand that ‘her traffic is good’, namely, "To sell all she has and to give to the poor, and naked to follow the naked Jesus Christ"[5] . This is what the Book of Job says:

*Skin for skin, and all that a man hath he will give for his life*. [Job 2.4]

A man who tastes and sees how sweet the Lord is will give and exchange the skin of worldly pomp for the skin of heavenly glory; or he will give his skin (this material and mortal body) to the executioner and torturer, and will expose it to death and the sword for the glorious skin of immortal glory. Our body is well-called ‘skin’. The more a skin or hide is washed, the more discoloured it gets. So our body, the more it is delicately nourished and favoured with pleasures, the more quickly it grows old and wrinkled. A man will give not only his skin, but everything he has, to save his life. Just so the Apostles, who left skin and everything, were found fit to hear the words;

*You will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*. [Mt 19.28]

**(A sermon on the circumstances of sin to be confessed and put away: *Josue took Maceda*.)**

22. We, like true and vigorous explorers, should in these forty days go about the whole

region of our body, carefully seeking out whatever sins we have committed by sight, hearing, taste, smell or touch; confessing our sins and their circumstances so that no remnants remain, following the example of Joshua who (as his Book tells),

*Joshua took Maceda and destroyed it, with the edge of the sword; and killed the king and all the inhabitants thereof. He left not in it the least remains*. [Jos 10.28]

Maceda means 'first', or 'scorching'. It stands for sin, from which man is first scorched in Baptism. This sin is taken captive in penance. The 'king' of the city is evil will, which is struck by the edge of the 'sword' (oral confession). The 'inhabitants' thereof are the five senses which obey the will, which must similarly be killed by penance and recalled from sin. The 'remains' are the remembrances of sin and the inclination to pleasure, and these are not to be spared either.

In the same passage,

*Joshua conquered all the country of the hills and of the south of the plain, and of Asedoth, with their kings. He left not any remains therein, but slew all that breathed*. [Jos 10.40]

The 'hill country' is pride; the 'south' is cupidity; the 'plain', lust (in it the lustful horse wanders unbridled as through fields). Asedoth is 'things to be made, of the people': it stands for every unclean imagination which feeds the fire of sin. All these we must lay waste in confession, with the intention of never sinning again; and for these we must make suitable satisfaction so that when the body has elevated itself we must humble it the more in confession; and to the extent that it took pleasure, the more we must give it pain- bread and water, the discipline, staying awake. Then like the daughter of Jephthah it will hear these words:

*Thou hast deceived me, my daughter*

(my flesh, with the pleasures of greed and lust),

*and thou thyself are now deceived*, [cf. Jg 11.35]

that is, afflicted with disciplines, vigils and fasts.

Now we have gone over these things concerning the spirit of contrition, the desert of confession, and the forty days of satisfaction (on which is based the remission of all sins, the infusion of grace, and the reward of eternal life), we must proceed to describe their opposites: greed, vainglory and lust.

**(A sermon on the cursed three, wherein the devil tempts us: *Let us put on the new man*.)**

23. There follows: *And the tempter coming said to him: If thou be the Son of God*, etc. [Mt 4.3]

The devil always acts according to the same manner. In the same way that he tempted Adam in Paradise, he tempted Christ in the desert, and he tempts every christian in this world. First he tempted Adam by greed, vainglory and avarice, and overcame him by this temptation. Then he tempted Christ, the second Adam, in the same way; but in tempting he himself was overcome, because it was not just a man, but God, whom he was tempting. We share in both Adams, the first by the flesh and the second by the spirit. We must put off the old man with his actions (greed, vainglory and avarice) and put on the new man by confession and renewal, so as to restrain the unbridled heat of greed by fasting, to repress the uprising of vainglory by humble confession, and tread down the thick mud of avarice by contrition of heart. *Blessed are the poor in spirit*, says the Lord, meaning the humble and contrite of heart, *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* [Mt 5.3].

24. Just as the devil tempted the Lord in the desert by greed, in the temple by vainglory and on the mountain by avarice; so he tempts us every day: by greed in the desert of fasting, by vainglory in the temple of prayer and Office, and by multiple avarice on the mount of dignity. While we fast, he tempts us by greed, wherein (as the verse goes[6] ) we may sin in five ways: "Hastily, sumptuously, excessively, eagerly, carefully."

HASTILY, before the proper time;

SUMPTUOUSLY, when taste is excited though appetite is depressed, with all kinds of sauces, decorations and fancy foods.

EXCESSIVELY, when we take more food than the body needs. Gluttons say, "We are bound to fast, so let us eat at one meal enough to make up for breakfast and supper." They are like locusts who, once they settle on a tree, do not leave it until they have eaten everything. The locust is all mouth, the image of a glutton who consists entirely of a greedy belly. They lay siege to their plate as to a castle, not abandoning it until they have consumed the lot. Their belly goes on rumbling until the plate is clean!

EAGERLY, rushing upon the food and, like a man about to do battle against an army, stretching out their arms, extending their hands, and just scoffing! At the table, they behave like the proverbial dog, who wants no companion in the kitchen.

CAREFULLY, demanding dainty foods that must be prepared, Oh! so precisely. Remember the sons of Eli in I Kings, who would not take cooked meat, only raw, so as to prepare it with greater care and delicacy [cf. 1Kg(Sm) 2.15].

25. The devil tempts us in the temple of vainglory. While we are at prayer, at Office or in preaching, we are assailed by the lances of vainglory from the devil. Alas! How often we are wounded! There are those who kneel and sigh as they pray, wanting to be noticed.

There are others who, when they sing in choir, strain their voices and warble in their throats, so as to be heard. Others again, when they preach, thunder with their voices, quote learned authors, applying them according to their own ideas, and go round in circles to be praised. Believe me, all these hirelings have received their reward already. Moses says in Leviticus:

*Do not make your daughter a prostitute*. [Lev 19.29]

My work is my ‘daughter’, and I prostitute it and put it in a brothel when I sell it for the coin of vainglory. In Matthew, the Lord gives this advice:

*But thou, when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber and, having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret*. [Mt 6.6]

When you want to pray or do some good deed (which is *to pray without ceasing* [cf. 1Thess 5.17], enter into the secret chamber of your heart and close the door of your five senses, so as not to try to be seen, heard or praised. Luke says that Zacharias went into the Temple of the Lord at the hour of incense. At the time of prayer, which goes up like incense in the sight of the Lord, you must enter the temple of your heart and so pray to your Father; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you [cf. Lk 1.9].

26. On the mountain of transitory dignity we are tempted with the sin of multiple avarice. Avarice may be not only for money, but for eminence. The more misers have, the more they want; and when promoted, the higher they are the higher they want to go. So a greater fall ruins them, because "The winds blow hardest in the highest places"[7] ; and it was on the ‘high places’ that sacrifice was made to idols [cf. 1Kg 3.2; 22.44; 2Kg 12.3; 14.4; 15.35; 2Chr 20.33]. Solomon says of these two,

*Fire never says Enough*. [Prov 30.16]

‘Fire’ (avarice for money or position) never says "Enough!", but "Give, give!" [cf. Prov 30.17]. O Lord Jesus, take away these two ‘Gives’ from the prelates of your Church, take them away! >From your inheritance- which you gained by blows, spitting, scourging, the cross, nails, vinegar, gall and spear- they take pleasure and glory on the mountain of ecclesiastical dignity.

Let us, then- who take the name Christian from Christ- with singlehearted devotion pray Jesus Christ the Son of God, and earnestly beg him to grant us that we may be led by the spirit of contrition into the desert of confession; so that in these forty days we may receive the remission of our sins. Then, renewed and purified, may we be found fit to enjoy the gladness of his holy Resurrection, and to be established in the glory of everlasting happiness. May he grant this, to whom be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] *BREVIARIUM ROMANUM*, Antiphon at Terce in Lent.

[2] OVID, *Remedia amoris*, 161-162

[3] BERNARD (=GAUFRIDUS), *Declamationes*, 44,54; PL 184.465

[4] SENECA, *Epistola* 48,12

[5] cf. INNOCENT III, *sermo* 26, PL 217.573

[6] cf. GREGORY, *Moralium* XXX,18,60; PL 76.556-557

[7] OVID, *Remedia amoris*, 369

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT (FIRST SERMON) **&** SECOND SERMON)

## SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT (FIRST SERMON)

**(The fifth Gospel, for the second Sunday of Lent: *Jesus took Peter*.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for preachers: *Come up to me upon the mount*.)**

1. *Jesus took Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain*, etc. [Mt 17.1]

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

*Come up to me into the mount, and be there. And I will give thee two tables, the law and the commandments, which I have written, that thou mayst teach the children of Israel*. [Ex 14.12]

Moses ('Drawn from the waters' [cf. Ex 2.10]) represents the preacher who irrigates the minds of the faithful with the water of doctrine, springing up to eternal life [cf. Jn 4.14]. The Lord says to him, *Come up to me into the mount*. 'The mount', because of its height, represents the excellence of a holy life. The preacher must leave behind the valley of temporal things, and climb up it by the ladder of divine love. There he will find the Lord, for the Lord is found in the excellence of a holy life. As Genesis says:

*On the mountain the Lord will see*, [Gen 22.14]

that is, in the excellence of a holy life, the Lord makes him see and understand what he owes to God, and what to his neighbour.

*I will give thee two tables*. The two tables stand for the knowledge of the two Testaments, which alone contain and impart knowledge. This is the only true knowledge, which teaches us to love God, despise the world and subdue the flesh. These are the things the preacher must teach to the children of Israel, and on them depend all the Law and the prophets [cf. Mt 22.40]. But where can such precious knowledge be found?

Truly, ‘on the mount’*. Come up to me into the mount, and be there*, for *there is the change of the right hand of the Most High* [Ps 76.11], the Transfiguration of the Lord, the contemplation of true joy. So today’s Gospel says, *Jesus took Peter and James and John*, etc.

2. In this Gospel there are five points worthy of special attention:

The ascent of Jesus Christ with the three Apostles upon the mountain;

His Transfiguration;

The appearance of Moses and Elijah;

The bright cloud overshadowing them; and

The proclamation by the Father’s voice, This is my beloved Son.

As God may inspire us, let us see what is the moral significance of these five, to the honour of God and the benefit of your souls.

**(A sermon for penitents or religious: *When thou shalt come to the oak of Thabor*.)**

3. Let us say, then: *Jesus took Peter and James and John*.

These three Apostles, the special companions of Jesus Christ, may be understood as three virtues of our soul, without which no-one can climb the mountain of light, the excellence of holy conversation. Peter is the one who acknowledged, James (or Jacob) is ‘the supplanter’, John is ‘the grace of the Lord’. Jesus took Peter, and you too must take Peter, you who believe in Jesus and hope for salvation from Jesus. Peter is the acknowledgement of your sins, which consist in these three things: pride in the heart, lust in the flesh and avarice in the world. Take James, too. He is the supplanting of these vices, so that you may tread the pride of your spirit under the foot of reason; so that you may mortify the lust of your flesh, and repress the vanity of the deceitful world. And take John, the grace of the Lord, which stands at the door and knocks [cf. Apoc 3.20], so that it may enlighten you to recognise the evil things you have done, and help you in the good things you have begun to do.

These are the three men of whom Samuel told Saul, in the first book of Kings:

*When thou shalt come to the oak of Thabor, there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine*. [1Kg(Sm) 10.3]

The oak of Thabor and Mount Thabor stand for the excellence of a holy life, which may

well be called ‘an oak’, ‘a mount’, or ‘Thabor’. An oak, because it is constant and unbending through perseverance to the end; a mount, because it is high and lifted up by the contemplation of God; and Thabor (‘the coming light’) by the enlightening of good example. These three things are required in the excellence of a holy life: that it be constant in itself, contemplative towards God, and enlightening to our neighbour. When you come to or prepare to climb the oak or mount of Thabor, these three men going up to God will meet you. These three are Peter who recognises, James who supplants and John the grace of God. Peter bears three kids, James three loaves, and John a bottle of wine.

‘Peter’ is he who recognises himself as a sinner, and he carries three kids. The goat represents the stink of sin, and the three goats are the three kinds of sin which in general we commit: pride in the heart, unruliness in the flesh and avarice in the world. Whoever wants to climb the mountain of light must carry these three kids. That is to say, he must recognise himself as a sinner in these three ways.

‘James’ is he who uproots the vices of the flesh, and he carries three loaves of bread. Bread represents the sweet savour of the mind, consisting in humility of heart, chastity of body and love of poverty. No-one can have this savour unless he has first uprooted the vices. He carries three loaves of bread, the threefold savour of the mind which represses pride of heart, restrains the unruliness of the flesh and drives away the avarice of the world.

‘John’ is he who (with God’s grace going before him and following) keeps all these faithfully and perseveringly. He carries a bottle of wine, and the wine in the bottle is the grace of the Holy Spirit in a good will. Jesus took Peter and James and John: do you also take these three men, and climb mount Thabor.

**(A sermon on the Nativity of the Lord or for a feast of blessed Mary: *Jacob saw in his sleep a ladder*.)**

4. But, believe me, the climb is hard because the mountain is high. Do you want to climb it with ease? Then you must use the ladder of which we read and sing in the Office reading for this Sunday:

*Jacob saw in his sleep a ladder lifted up and standing upon the earth, and the top thereof touching heaven; the angels also of God ascending and descending by it, and the Lord leaning upon the ladder*. [Gen 28.12-13]

Notice each word, and how it is **concordant** with the Gospel. ‘He saw’- that is the knowledge of sin, of which St Bernard[1] says, "Let not God give me any other vision to see, save to know my sins." ‘Jacob’ (which is the same as James) is the supplanting of the flesh. Of him, Esau said,

*He hath supplanted me this second time*. [Gen 27.36]

'In sleep' means the grace of God, which brings the sleep of quiet and peace. Sleep is described like this by the Philosopher[2] : "Sleep is the resting of an animal's powers, with a strengthening of its natural abilities.2 When someone sleeps the sleep of grace, what is carnal in him rests from its depravity, and he attends to what is spiritual. So it says in Genesis:

*When the sun was setting, a deep sleep fell upon Abraham,*

*and a great horror seized upon him*. [Gen 15.12]

By the sun, we understand carnal pleasure, which when it lies down allows sleep (the ecstasy of contemplation) to fall upon us, and a great horror seizes us regarding our past sins and the pains of hell. Would you hear of the increase of what is spiritual, and the remission of what is carnal? *I sleep*, says the Bride in the Canticles*, but my heart keeps watch* in the contemplation of heavenly things. So it is well said that *Jacob saw in his sleep a ladder*. By it you can climb Mount Thabor.

5. This ladder has two sides and six rungs by which to climb. The ladder represents Jesus Christ, who two sides are his divine and his human nature. The six rungs are his humility, poverty, wisdom, mercy, patience and obedience.

He was humble when he took our nature and looked upon the humility of his handmaid.

He was poor in his birth, when the poor virgin who bore the very Son of God had nowhere to lie down.

He was wise in his preaching (for *he began to do and to teach* [Acts 1.1]).

He was merciful in his kindly treatment of sinners (*I came not to call the just, but sinners to repentance* [Mt 9.13]).

He was patient in the face of scourges, blows, spitting (wherefore he says by Isaiah, *I have set my face like a flint*. [Is 50.7]) When a stone is struck, it does not strike back or murmur against whoever breaks it. So Christ,

*when he was reviled, did not revile; when he suffered, he threatened not*. [1Pt 2.23]

And finally,

*he was made obedient even to death, death on a cross*. [Phil 2.8]

This ladder stands upon the earth, as he stood in his preaching and working of miracles. It touches heaven because (as St Luke says) *He spent the night in the prayer of the Lord*

[Lk 6.12].

This ladder has been set up, so why do you not climb it? Why do you crawl upon the earth, on hands and knees? Climb! Jacob saw angels going up and down by the ladder. Go up, you angels, you prelates of the Church and you faithful of Jesus Christ! Go up, I say, to contemplate *how sweet the Lord is* [Ps 33.9]. Go down to help and counsel, for your neighbour needs these. Why climb by any other way, when you can go up by the ladder? On either side of where you want to climb, there is a sheer precipice. *O foolish and slow of heart* [Lk 24.25]- I will not say, 'to believe', because you do believe, as *even the demons believe*, [Jas 2.19]- but how hard and slow you are to action! Do you think you can climb Mount Thabor by some other way to reach the rest which is light and the glory of heavenly bliss; some way other than by the ladder of humility, poverty and the Lord's Passion? Indeed you can not! The Lord's word is:

*He who would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me*. [Mt 16.24]

And Jeremiah says:

*Thou shalt call me Father and shalt not cease to walk after me*. [Jer 3.19]

St Augustine[3] tells us that "The doctor sips the bitter potion first, so that the sick man may not be afraid to drink it." St Gregory[4] says that "By a bitter cup to drink we come to the joy of health;" and, "To save your life you would endure fire and sword."[5] Go up, then, and do not be afraid, because the Lord is leaning upon the ladder, ready to receive those climbing it. In this way, then, *Jesus took Peter and James and John, and went up onto a high mountain*.

**(A sermon for the faithful of the Church: *Moses and Aaron*, and on the property of the sapphire.)**

6. There follows, secondly: *And he was transfigured before them* [Mt 17.2].

Press yourself like soft wax against this shape, that you may receive the shape of Jesus Christ, whose

*face did shine as the sun; and his garments became white as snow*. [ibid]

There are four things to notice in this text: his face, the sun, his garments and the snow. Let us see the moral significance of each of them.

Note that in the front of the head (which in a human being we call the face) there are three senses, arranged and disposed in a most orderly manner: sight, smell and taste, with smell as it were a kind of balance between sight and taste. In a similar way there

are three spiritual senses in the face of our soul, arranged in due order by the wisdom of the supreme maker: the sight of faith, the smell of discernment and the taste of contemplation.

7. Of the sight which is faith, we read in Exodus that

*Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abiu, and seventy of the ancients of Israel went up; and the saw the God of Israel; and under his feet as it were a work of sapphire stone, and as the heaven when clear*. [Ex 24.9-10]

This text describes all those who see, and what they should see (that is, believe), with the eye of faith. Moses ('drawn from the waters') represents all religious, who ought to be drenched with the water of tears. To this end they have been taken out of the river of Egypt, that they may 'sow in tears' in this fearful desert, and afterwards 'reap in exultation' in the promised land. Aaron the high priest ('mountainous') represents all the greater prelates of the Church, who are established upon the mountain of dignity. Nadab ('spontaneous') stands for all who are subject to authority, and who should obey freely and not by coercion. Abiu ('their father') stands for all who are married according to the rites of the Church, to become parents of children. The seventy elders of Israel are all the baptized, who in Baptism received the Spirit of sevenfold grace.

All these see and believe (and should see and believe) the God of Israel*. Under his feet as it were a work of sapphire stone* indicates what they should believe. The words 'the God of Israel' express the divinity, while "under his feet" denotes the humanity of Jesus Christ, whom we should believe to be true God and true man. Moses, in Deuteronomy, says of these feet:

*They that approach to his feet shall receive of his doctrine*. [Dt 33.3]

So, too, it is said that Mary sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his words [cf. Lk 10.39]. 'Under the Lord's feet' (that is, after the Incarnation of Jesus Christ) there appeared the work of the Lord, like a sapphire stone and like the clear sky. Sapphire and the sky are the same colour.

Note that the sapphire has four properties: it has the appearance of a star; it destroys the plague; it resembles a clear sky; and it restrains blood. In this way, the sapphire resembles Holy Church, which began from the Incarnation of Christ, and which will last until the end of the world. She is divided into four orders: Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors and Virgins, which we understand properly by analogy with the properties of the sapphire.

The sapphire has the appearance of a star, and so represents the apostles who first showed forth the morning-star of faith to those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death [cf. Lk 1.79]. By its touch, the sapphire destroys the plague (which is a deadly sickness), and so it represents the martyrs who, by their martyrdom, destroyed the plague of idolatry. Having the same colour as the sky, the sapphire stands for confessors

who, reckoning all temporal things to be rubbish, have hung themselves by the thread of divine love in contemplation of heavenly bliss. They say with the Apostle, *Our conversation is in heaven* [Phil 3.20]. The sapphire also restrains the blood, and so represents virgins who, for love of the heavenly Bridegroom, totally restrain in themselves the blood of carnal lust. This, then, is the wonderful work of the sapphire stone which appeared under the Lord's feet. This makes clear to you what your soul should see, and what it should believe with the eyes of faith.

**(A sermon on discretion: *Thy nose is as the tower of Libanus*, etc.)**

8. In the Canticle of Love, the sense of smell (good judgement, discretion) is alluded to in the words:

*Thy nose is as the tower of Libanus that looketh towards Damascus*. [Cant 7.4]

Again, there are four words to note especially in this verse: nose, tower, Libanus and Damascus. The nose represents discretion, the tower humility, Libanus (Lebanon, 'whitening') chastity and Damascus ('blood-drinking') the malice of the devil. The 'nose' of the soul is the virtue of discretion, which sniffs out vice and virtue as the nose distinguishes nice and nasty smells. It also scents from a distance the approaching temptations of the devil. So Job says (referring to the just man):

*He smelleth the battle afar off, the encouraging of the captains and the shouting of the army*. [Job 39.25]

The faithful soul senses with her 'nose' (the virtue of discretion) the battle of the flesh, the encouraging of the captains (the misleading suggestions of vain reasoning, which under the guise of holiness may lead the soul to fall into the pit of iniquity), and the shouting of the army, the temptations of the demons who roar like beasts. (The word translated as 'shouting' actually implies a bestial noise.)

The nose of the Bride must be like the Tower of Libanus. The virtue of discretion is to be found most of all in humility of heart and chastity of body. Humility is well-called 'the tower of chastity', because like a tower which defends a castle, humility of heart defends the chastity of the body against the spears of fornication. If the Bride's 'nose' is like that, she can look boldly towards 'Damascus' (the devil) who desires to drink the blood of our souls. She sees very clearly his malice and subtlety.

**(A sermon on contemplation: *Taste and see*, and on the property of the sun.)**

9. Regarding the 'taste' of contemplation, the Prophet says;

*Taste and see how sweet the Lord is*. [Ps 33.9]

'Taste': that is to say, press within your mind's throat, and by this pressure recognise, the blessedness of that heavenly Jerusalem, the glorification of holy souls, the ineffable glory of the angelic dignity and the everlasting sweetness of the Trinity and Unity. Taste, too, how great it will be to share the glory of the choirs of angels, to praise God with untiring voice, to behold the presence of the face of God, to gaze upon the manna of the divinity held in the urn of his humanity. If you taste these things, truly you will see how sweet the Lord is. Blessed is that soul whose face is characterised and equipped with such senses!

Note, too, how the sense of smell is situated like a balance between sight (faith) and taste (contemplation). In faith, discernment is necessary lest we try to 'approach and see the burning bush' [Ex 3.3], or lest we try to *undo the latchet of the shoe* [Lk 3.10]; in other words, lest we try to fathom the secret of the Lord's Incarnation. Just believe; that is enough. It is not within your power to undo the fastening. Solomon says:

*He that is a searcher of Majesty shall be overwhelmed by glory*. [Prov 25.27]

So let us firmly believe, and simply confess.

In contemplation, discernment is also necessary so that we do not try *to be more wise than it behoveth to be wise* [cf. Rom 12.3]. To this end, Solomon says in Proverbs:

*My son, thou hast found honey* [the sweetness of contemplation];

*eat what is sufficient for thee, lest being glutted therewith thou vomit it up*. [Prov 25.16]

He 'vomits up honey' who, not being content with the grace that has been freely given him, wants to pin down the sweetness of contemplation by human reason. He does not pay attention to what Genesis says, that when Benjamin was born, Rachel died [cf. Gen 35.17,19]. Benjamin represents the grace of contemplation, Rachel stands for human reason. When Benjamin is born, Rachel dies, because when the mind is lifted above itself in contemplation and beholds something by the light of the divinity, all human reason fails. This failure of reason is what is meant by the 'death of Rachel'. As someone[6] has said, "Nobody can reach by human reason the place to which Paul was carried up." So the 'smell' of discernment should be like a balance between the 'sight' of faith and the 'taste' of contemplation; then the face of our soul will shine like the sun.

**(A sermon on the mercy of God towards converted sinners: *If your sins be as scarlet*.)**

10. Note also these three qualities in the sun: brightness, whiteness and heat. These three properties correspond very well with the aforementioned senses of the soul. The brightness of the sun corresponds to the spiritual sense of sight which is faith, which beholds and believes things unseen, in the brightness of its own light. Whiteness, that is to say cleanness and purity, corresponds to the spiritual sense of smell, discernment.

This is appropriate, for just as we hold our nose and turn away from a bad smell, so by the virtue of discernment we should turn away from the uncleanness of sin. The sun's heat corresponds to the spiritual taste, contemplation, in which there is truly the heat of love. That is why St Bernard[7] says: "It is impossible that the supreme Good be seen and not loved." God himself is love.

Pay attention then, beloved, and see how useful and salutary it is to take these three companions and go up onto the mountain of light. There, truly, is the transfiguration from *the form of this world, which is passing away* [cf. 1Cor 7.31] into the form of God which remains for ever and ever. Of this it is said, *His face shone like the sun*. Let the face of our souls too shine like the sun, so that what we see by faith we may show forth by our works; so that by the virtue of discernment we may pursue outwardly, in purity of action, the good which we perceive inwardly; and so that what we taste in the contemplation of God we may radiate in the warmth of our love for our neighbour. That is how our face will shine like the sun.

11. There follows:

*His raiment was made white as snow, as no fuller on earth could make it.* [Mk 9.2]

The raiment of our soul is our body and its members. These must be white, according to the words of Solomon:

*At all times let thy garments be white*. [Eccles 9.8]

What sort of whiteness? The whiteness of snow. Through Isaiah, the Lord promises to sinners who are converted:

*If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow*. [Is 1.18]

Consider 'scarlet' and 'snow': scarlet is material dyed the colour of blood and fire, snow is cold and white. Fire denotes the heat of sin, and blood its uncleanness. The cold of snow stands for the grace of the Holy Spirit, and its whiteness for cleanness of mind. So when the Lord says, *If your sins be as scarlet*, he is saying that if you are converted he will pour into you the grace of the Holy Spirit to put out the fire of sin and wash away its uncleanness. So he says by Ezekiel:

*I will pour upon you clean water and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness*. [Ezek 36.25]

Our clothes (our bodily members) should be 'white as snow'. The coolness of the snow (compunction of heart) should extinguish the burning of sin, and the whiteness of holy conversation should wash away the uncleanness of sin.

Another way of looking at it is this: the clothes of the soul are the virtues. Clothed with these, our soul will appear glorious in the sight of God. Today's Scripture reading refers to these clothes, saying that

*Rebecca put on Jacob very good garments, which she had at home with her*. [Gen 27.15]

Rebecca (the Wisdom of God the Father) clothes Jacob (the just man) with good garments (the virtues, woven and made by the hand of Wisdom herself), which she has with her in the treasury of her glory. She really does have them, because God is Lord and owner of all. She really does have them, because God gives to all whom he will, when and how he will. These garments she puts on Jacob, the just man. These garments are white in their effect, because they make a man white not (I would say) just as snow, but even whiter than snow. Garments like these no 'fuller'- no preacher, that is- can ever make on earth by the cleansing work of preaching.

**(A sermon for a prelate: *And there appeared Moses and Elias*.)**

12. There follows, thirdly:

*And there appeared to them Moses and Elias talking with him*. [Mt 17.3]

To the just man- thus transfigured, thus illuminated and thus clothed- there appear Moses and Elijah.

*Moses was a man exceeding meek above all men that dwelt upon earth*. [Num 12.3]

*His eye was not dim, neither were his teeth moved*. [Dt 34.7]

Moses represents the meekness of patience and mercy. Like an obedient child, or like an animal which is responsive to its master's hand, he was responsive to the hand of divine grace. His eye- that is, his reason- was not dimmed by the grime of hatred, nor was it obscured by the cloud of rancour. His teeth were not moved to murmur against anyone, nor to bite them by detraction.

Elijah (who, as the third book of Kings tells, slew the prophets of Baal at the Brook Kishon) stands for the zeal of justice. Baal means 'master' or 'devourer', and Kishon means 'their hardness'. He who is truly aglow with zeal for justice slays the prophets and servants of pride (which always seeks to be master) and of greed and lust (which devour all things) with the sword of preaching, denunciation and excommunication: so that being dead to vice, they may live to God [cf. Gal 2.19]. He does this at the Brook Kishon, the abounding hardness of their hearts whereby they store up for themselves wrath in the day of wrath, when the just judgement of God shall be revealed [cf. Rom 2.5].

The Lord says of this hardness, to Ezekiel:

*Those to whom I send thee are children of a hard neck and of an obstinate heart; for all the house of Israel are of a hard forehead and a stiff neck*. [Ezek 2.4; 3.7]

The person with a 'hard forehead' is someone who, when rebuked, not only despises the correction but is not even ashamed of the sin. Jeremiah rebukes him, saying:

*Thou hast a harlot's forehead, thou wouldst not blush*. [Jer 3.3]

So Moses and Elijah, the meekness of mercy and zeal for justice, should appear with the just man when he is transfigured upon the mount of holy conversation, so that like the Samaritan he may pour wine and oil upon the wounds of the man who has been attacked; so that the sharpness of wine may give bite to the soothing oil, and the soothing oil may temper the sharpness of the wine.

For this reason it is said in Matthew that the angel who appeared at the Resurrection of Christ had a countenance like lightning, and raiment like snow [cf. Mt 28.3]. The lightning denotes the severity of judgement, the whiteness of snow the gentleness of mercy. The angel (that is, the prelate) should have a countenance like lightning, so that at his holy conversation the women (here standing for weak and feeble minds) may be terrified at his gaze. So Esther was, as we are told in that Book:

*When King Assuerus had lifted up his countenance, and with burning eyes had shown the wrath of his heart, the queen sunk down. And her colour turned pale: and she rested her weary head upon her handmaid*. [Est 15.10]

But the prelate, like Assuerus, should stretch out the golden sceptre of kindness, and put on raiment like snow, so that those whom fatherly strictness has corrected should be comforted by a mother's kindness. There is a saying, "When you feel the chastisement of your father, take refuge on the breast of your mother."

The prelate should be like the pelican, who is reputed to slay his children, but then to draw blood from his own body and pour it upon them to revive them. The prelate, though he corrects his children, those subject to him, with the scourge of discipline; and even 'slays' them with the sword of harsh rebuke: should recall them to penitence, the life of the soul, by his own blood, the compassion of his heart and the shedding of tears, which Augustine[8] calls "the blood of the soul".

**(A sermon for the dedication of a church or on the feast of a martyr or confessor: *After all things were perfected*.)**

13. If these three things come to pass in you, namely: the ascent of the mountain, the transfiguration, and the appearance of Moses and Elijah, then the fourth will follow:

*Behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them*.

There is a similar incident towards the end of Exodus, where it says:

*After all things were perfected, the cloud covered the tabernacle of the testimony, and the glory of the Lord filled it.* [Ex 40.31-2]

There were four things in the tabernacle of testimony: the seven-branched candlestick, the table of proposition, the ark of the covenant and the golden altar [cf. Ex 25]. The "tabernacle" is the just man. The tent reminds us that *man's life is a warfare on earth* [Job 7.1], and armed soldiers are accustomed to attack the enemy from their camp. The just man, prepared for battle, both attacks and defends. It has been said,[9] "It is a skilful adversary that makes you a skilful fighter." This tent is 'of testimony', referring to the witness that the just man has not only 'from those outside' [cf. 1Tim 3.7], whose witness is not always reliable, but from within himself, *the glory of a good conscience* [cf. 2Cor 1.12] and not the tongue of someone else.

In this tent of witness, the 'gold candlestick of beaten work', with its seven lamps, is the compunction of the just man's golden heart, beaten with many sighs as by so many mallets. The seven lamps of this candlestick are the three kids, three loaves of bread, and the bottle of wine which the three companions mentioned earlier carry. In the just man's tabernacle is the 'table of proposition', by which we understand the excellence of holy life, upon which the loaves of proposition should be placed, the refreshment of preaching to be set before everyone. (That is why the Apostle says, *I am a debtor to the Greek and to the barbarian* [Rom 1.4]. There, too, is the 'ark of the covenant', containing the manna and the rod. The ark, the mind of the just man, should contain the manna of meekness (so that he may be a Moses) and the rod of correction (so that he may be an Elijah). There is also the golden altar, meaning the firm intention of persevering to the end. On this altar, the incense of devout compunction is offered daily, together with the sweet-smelling perfume of prayer.

14. So the words are appropriate, *After all things were perfected, the cloud covered the tabernacle of the testimony*. The cloud which covers such a tabernacle, in which all things belonging to perfection are made perfect, so that the glory of the Lord fills it, is the cloud spoken of in today's Gospel,

*And a bright cloud overshadowed them*.

The grace of God overshadows the just man who is transfigured on the mountain of light, the mountain of holy conversation. It hides him from the heat of worldly prosperity, from the rain of carnal desire, and from the storm of demonic persecution. Then he is made capable of hearing *the whisper of a gentle breeze* [cf 3Kg 19.22], the sweet voice of God the Father, saying:

*This is my most dear Son, hear him*. [Mt 17.5]

He is truly worthy of being called a son of God, if he takes the three companions who have been mentioned, goes up the mountain, changes himself from the form of this world to the form of God, has Moses and Elijah as companions, and is overshadowed by the bright cloud.

We ask you then, Lord Jesus, to make us climb from this vale of tears to the mountain of a holy life; so that we may have the form of your Passion printed upon us, and be strengthened with the meekness of mercy and with zeal for justice. Then, in the day of judgement, may we be found fit to be overshadowed by the bright cloud; and hear the voice of joy, gladness and exultation, the voice which says:

*Come, ye blessed of my Father* (who blessed you on Mount Tabor), *receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world*.

May he, to whom all honour, glory, praise, dominion, majesty and eternity is due, deign to bring us to that kingdom. And let every spirit say: Amen.

NOTES

[1] BERNARD, reference unknown

[2] ARISTOTLE, *De somno et vigilia*, 3

[3] AUGUSTINE, *Ennar. in Ps*. 98.3; PL 37.1259

[4] cf. GREGORY, *Moralium* XXXI, 33, 70; PL 76.612

[5] OVID, *Remedia amoris*, 229

[6] cf. RICHARD OF ST VICTOR, *Beniamin minor* 73-74; PL 196.52-53

[7] BERNARD (=GUIGO), *Epistola ad fratres* II,3,18; PL 184-350

[8] cf. AUGUSTINE, *Epistola* 262.11; PL 33.1081

[9] OVID, *Epist. ex Pont*. II,3,53

# SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT (SECOND SERMON)

**(The Gospel for the same Sunday: *Jesus went out*. )**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for preachers: *Israel went out*.)**

1. *And Jesus went from there and retired into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan, who came out of those coasts, crying out, said to him: Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David*, etc. [Mt 15.21-22]

We are told in the first book of Kings that:

*Israel went out to war against the Philistines, and camped by the Stone of Help*. [1Kg (Sam) 4.1]

Israel means 'the seed of God', and signifies the preacher (or his preaching) of which Isaiah says:

*Except the Lord of Hosts had left us seed (i.e. preaching), we had been as Sodom; and we should have been like to Gomorrha*. [Is 1.9]

He should go out to war against the Philistines (Philistine means 'falling through drink'), the demons who, being drunk with pride, fell from heaven. He goes out to battle against them when, by his preaching, he strives to rescue the sinner from their hands; but this he can only do if he camps by the Stone of Help.

The 'Stone of Help' is Christ, who is referred to in this Sunday's Office reading:

*Jacob took a stone, and putting it under his head, slept*. [Gen 28.11]

In this way, the preacher should rest his head (his mind) upon Jesus Christ, the Stone of Help; so that he may rest upon him, and in and through him overcome the demons. This is the meaning of the words, 'encamped by the Stone of Help', because he sets the camp of his conversation, and pitches the tents of his preaching, beside Jesus Christ who is his help in time of trouble, and he trusts in him, and attributes everything to him.

So, in the name of Jesus Christ, I will go out against the Philistine (the demon), that I may in this preaching avail to free from his hand the sinner made captive by sin; and I trust entirely in his grace, which *goes forth for the salvation of his people* [cf. Hab 3.14]. As the present Gospel says, *Jesus went out, and retired into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon*.

2. In summary, this Gospel contains three main points: the going out of Jesus Christ; the petition of the Canaanite woman for her daughter, afflicted by the demon; and the freeing of her daughter. We shall explore the moral significance of these three.

**(A sermon on contempt of the world: *Jacob, being departed from Bersabee*.)**

3. *Jesus went out*, says Matthew. The going-out of Jesus signifies the way the penitent man goes out from the vanity of the world, as we hear in the Office reading for this Sunday:

*Jacob, being departed from Bersabee, went on to Haran*. [Gen 28.10]

Note the **concord** between the two Testaments: *Jesus went from there and retired to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon* (Matthew); and *Jacob, being departed from Bersabee, went on to Haran* (Moses, in Genesis).

Jacob means 'supplanter', signifying the converted sinner who treads the sensuality of the flesh beneath the foot of reason. He goes out from Bersabee (meaning 'the seventh well'), which stands for the insatiable desire of the world, which is *the root of all evils* [cf. 1Tim 6.10]. John refers to the well in his Gospel, where the Samaritan woman says to Jesus:

*Sir, thou hast nothing wherein to draw, and the well is deep*. [Jn 4.11]

Jesus replied:

*Whosoever drinketh of this well shall thirst again*. [Jn 4.13]

O Samaritan woman, how truly do you say that the well is deep! The desire of the world is deep indeed- it is bottomless! That is why everyone who drinks the water of this well, transitory riches and delights, will thirst again. 'Again', because as Solomon says in Proverbs:

*The horse-leech has two daughters that say, Bring, bring*. [Prov 30.15]

The 'horse-leech' is the devil, who thirsts for our soul's blood, and desires to suck it. His 'two daughters' are riches and pleasures, which always say, *Bring, bring*.. and never say, *It is enough*.

The Apocalypse says of this same well (or pit):

*The smoke of the pit arose, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened.. And from the smoke of the pit there came out locusts upon the earth*. [Apoc 9.2-3]

The smoke which blinds the eyes of reason goes up from the pit of worldly desire; the great furnace of Babylon. Sun and air are darkened by this smoke. 'Sun and air' stand for religious, who are like the sun because they should be pure, warm and full of light; and like the air because they should be contemplatives, 'airy'.

But, forced out by sin, smoke has gone forth from the pit of cupidity and blackened them all. As Jeremiah complains in Lamentations:

*How is the gold become dim, the finest colour is changed*. [Lam 4.1]

Sun and gold, air and the finest colour- these have the same meaning, so that the splendour of both the sun and of gold is made dim, and the air and the finest colour is changed. The words "dimmed" and "changed" are appropriate, for the smoke of cupidity dims the splendour of religious life, and covers the fine colour of heavenly contemplation with soot. Contemplation infuses the face of the soul with fine colours, white and red: white for the Lord's Incarnation, red for his Passion; ivory-white for chastity, burning red for the ardent desire for the heavenly bridegroom.

4. Alas and alas! How changed is this fine colour today, blackened by the smoke of cupidity! As it is further written:

*From the smoke of the pit came out locusts upon the earth*.

Locusts, because of their ability to jump, represent all religious who (by putting together the two feet of poverty and obedience) ought to leap upwards to the heights of eternal life. But, for shame! They jump backwards, going out from the smoke of the pit upon the earth. As Exodus says, they *cover the face of the earth* [Ex 10.5]. Nowadays there is not a market-place, not a court- whether secular or ecclesiastical- where you will not find monks and religious. They buy, and sell again.

"They build up and pull down, squaring the circle."[1]

In their law-suits they gather parties, appear before judges, hire lawyers and barristers, and call witnesses. With these, they are prepared to swear oaths for the sake of transitory things, frivolous and vain. Tell me, you fatuous religious, was it in the prophets, or in the Church's Gospels, or in St Paul's epistles, or in the Rules of St Benedict or St Augustine, that you found these lawsuits, these wanderings, these disputes about transitory and perishable things, these shouts and protests? Did not, rather, the Lord say to Apostles, monks and all religious (and not just by way of counsel, but by precept) that they should choose the way of perfection? In Luke's Gospel he says:

*But I say to you: Love your enemies. Do good to them that hate you. Bless them that curse you and pray for them that calumniate you. And to him that striketh thee on one cheek, offer also the other. And, him that taketh away from thee thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to everyone that asketh thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again. And as you would that men should do to you, do you also tho them in like manner. And, if you love them that love you, what thanks are to you? For sinners also love those that love them. And, if you do good to them who do good to you, what thanks are to you? For sinners also do this*. [Lk 6.27-33]

This is the Rule of Jesus Christ, to be preferred to all rules, institutions, traditions or new ideas, because, *The servant is not greater than his Lord; neither is the apostle greater than he that sent him* [Jn 13.16]. Pay attention! Listen and look, all you peoples! is there any madness, any presumption, like that of such religious? In their Rule or constitutions it says that each monk or canon should have two or three tunics, and two pairs of trousers, suitable for winter and summer. If by chance they lack these somewhere or at some time, they complain that due order is not being observed, that the Rule is being miserably broken! See how carefully they keep rules and regulations regarding the body, but keep little or not at all the Rule of Jesus Christ, without which they cannot be saved!

And what shall I say about clerics, and about the prelates of the Church? If any bishop or prelate contravenes a decree of Alexander or of Innocent, or of some other Pope, straightaway he is accused, summoned, convicted and deposed! But if he commits some mortal offence against the gospel of Jesus Christ, which it is his principal responsibility to uphold- no-one either accuses him or rebukes him! *They all love what is their own, not what is of Jesus Christ* [cf. Phil 2.21]. And so, in Matthew, Christ himself says of all these, whether religious or clerics:

*You have made void the commandment of God for your tradition. Hypocrites, well hath Isaias prophesied of you, saying: This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain do they worship me, teaching doctrines and commandments of men*. [Mt 15.6-9]

And he says again, in Luke:

*Woe to you, Pharisees, because you tithe mint and rue and every kind of herb, and pass over judgement and the charity of God. Now these things you ought to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Woe to you, Pharisees, because you love the uppermost seats in the synagogues and salutations in the market place. Woe to you lawyers also, because you load men with burdens which they cannot bear, and you yourselves touch not the packs with one of your fingers. Woe to you lawyers, for you have taken away the key of knowledge. You yourselves have not entered in; and those that were entering, you have hindered*. [Lk 11.42,43,46,52]

So it says rightly in the Apocalypse that

*The smoke of the pit arose as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened. And from the smoke of the pit there came out locusts upon the earth*.

**(A sermon for penitents: *The things which before my soul would not touch*, and on the three-fold temptation by the devil, and in what ways nocturnal pollution occurs.)**

5. The pit of worldly cupidity is called 'the seventh well' for two reasons: either because it is the cess-pool of seven sorts of crime (for *cupidity is the root of all evils*, the Apostle says [1Tim 6.10]); or because just as in Genesis the seventh day is not said to have an evening [cf. Gen 2.2], so cupidity never reaches a point of satisfaction. From this wretched pit the sinner comes out*: Jacob, being departed from Bersabee, went on to Haran*; and *Jesus went from there and retired to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon*.

What these three names (Tyre, Sidon and Haran) mean, we shall see. Tyre means 'distress', Sidon means 'hunting for grief', and Haran means 'high' or 'indignation'. So the penitent, going out from the cupidity of the world, retires to the region of Tyre, that is, of distress. There is, in fact, a two-fold distress for the penitent. The first is that which he has for the sins he has committed; the second is that which he undergoes from the three-fold temptation of the devil, the world and the flesh. Of the first of these, Job says:

*The things which before my soul would not touch, now, through anguish, are my meats*. [Job 6.7]

To the penitent, over and above the contrition he feels for his sins, constant vigils, an abundance of tears and frequent fasting are as it were delicate foods. Previously, before he turned back to penitence, his sensual soul, sated with temporal things, abhorred their touch. Whence Solomon says in Proverbs:

*A soul that is full shall tread upon the honeycomb;*

*and a soul that is hungry shall take even bitter for sweet*. [Prov 27.7]

6. Of the second anguish, the three-fold temptation of the just man, Isaiah says:

*As the whirlwinds come from Africa, desolation comes from the desert, from a terrible land.*

*A grievous vision is told me... Therefore are my loins filled with pain:*

*anguish hath taken hold of me, as the anguish of a woman in labour.*

*I fell down at the hearing of it; I was troubled at the seeing of it.*

*My heart failed, darkness amazed me*. [Is 21.1-2,3-4]

We should note these words: the whirlwind (the devil's suggestion), the desolation (the world's cupidity) and the grievous vision (the temptation of the flesh). The whirlwind from Africa is the devil's suggestion, disturbing and troubling the soul of the penitent. Whence it says in Job:

*A violent wind came on a sudden from the side of the desert, and shook the four corners of the house. And it fell upon and crushed the children of Job*. [Job 1.9]

This violent wind, which blows from the desert region, is the sudden assault of the devil, coming strongly and without warning. It shakes to the very foundations the 'four corners of the house', the four chief virtues of the just man's soul; and alas! Sometimes it causes him to fall into mortal sin, so that 'Job's children', the works and good desires of the just man, die.

7. The desolation from the desert is cupidity. It comes from the desert of the world, full of wild beasts, and it seeks to lay waste the wealth of poverty in the holy man who is contrite and penitent. So Joel says:

*Fire hath devoured the beautiful places of the wilderness,*

*and the flame hath burnt up all the trees of the country*. [Joel 1.19]

The fire of cupidity eats up and devours the 'beautiful places of the wilderness', the prelates and ministers of the Church who are set up in the desert of the world, and given by God to be the beauty and ornament of the Church itself. The flame of avarice burns up 'all the trees of the country', that is, all religious. These are well termed 'trees of the country', the country being the religious state into which they have been transplanted from the region of deceit and worldly vanity, to bring forth the fruit of heavenly glory.

8. The grievous vision, told from a terrible land, is the temptation of the flesh. It is well termed 'a terrible land', because it is made horrid and abominable by wandering thoughts, careless words, perverse deeds and many things unclean and filthy. The temptation of the flesh is called 'a grievous vision', because it comes chiefly through the medium of the eyes. That is why the Philosopher[2] says, "The eyes are the first lances of lust," and why Jeremiah, in Lamentations, bewails:

*My eye hath wasted my soul*. [Lam 3.51]

Blessed Augustine[3] says, "The shameless eye is herald of the shameless heart," and so, in the words of blessed Gregory,[4] "The eyes should be held captive, because they are

like robbers." In the fourth book of Kings we read how robbers led captive a little maid from the land of Israel, and she served the wife of Naaman the leper [cf. 4(2)Kg 5.2]. The robbers are the eyes, which steal the maiden of modesty and chastity from the land of Israel (the mind of the just man who sees God), and make her serve the wife (fornication) of Naaman the leper (the devil). From this wife the leprous devil begets many leprous sons and daughters.

An alternative interpretation is this: the temptation of the flesh is called ‘a grievous vision’ because it often comes in dreams, and leads to the pollution of the body; which greatly distresses (and so it should) the mind of the just man. So Job says:

*Thou wilt frighten me* (i.e. let me be frightened) *with dreams, and terrify me with visions;*

*so that my soul rather chooseth hanging, and my bones death*. [Job 7.14-15]

When the just man feels himself afflicted with horrible imaginations and dreams, he should get up straight away and suspend his soul in the contemplation of heavenly things; and he should afflict the bones of his unruly body, as it experiences a passing pleasure, with groans and blows.

This pollution usually comes in one of four ways. It may be that the organ which holds the semen is over-full, or else it may be due simply to bodily weakness. If so, there is little or no sin. But it may result from over-indulgence in food and drink, and if this becomes a habit it may be mortal. Or it may result from having gazed deliberately on a woman, with full consent of mind: and then it is altogether mortal.

So the penitent, who has left Bersabee and withdrawn to the region of Tyre, says*: Just as the whirlwinds come from Africa* (i.e. the suggestions of the devil), *so desolation* (cupidity, which lays waste everything) *comes from the desert* (the world); *and so too from the terrible land* (wretched flesh) *the grievous vision is told me*. Alas, alas! Lord God, where am I to flee from so great a whirlwind, so great a desolation, so grievous a vision? What am I to do? Hear what the penitent himself adds:

*Therefore are my loins filled with pain, anguish hath taken hold of me,*

*as the anguish of a woman in labour*.

When the ‘grievous vision from the terrible land’ is told to the penitent, his limbs are filled with pain, not pleasure. So he says with the Prophet: *Burn my reins*, etc. [Ps 25.2*], Anguish hath taken hold of me*... Truly that penitent has withdrawn to the region of Tyre, when he says, *Anguish hath taken hold of me*. What anguish? That of a woman in labour. If there is no greater physical pain than that of childbirth, there is no spiritual anguish greater than that of a just man in the midst of temptation. So it says in Exodus:

*The Egyptians hated the children of Israel, and afflicted them and mocked them; and they made their life bitter*. [Ex 1.14]

The Egyptians are the demons, wicked sinners and carnal motions. These all hate the children of Israel, the just. The demons afflict them, sinners mock them, and carnal motions make their life bitter.

9. The next words are:

*I fell down at the hearing of it, I was troubled at the seeing of it.*

*My heart failed, darkness amazed me*.

Each of these phrases must be related to its corresponding phrase. The penitent says, *When I heard* the whirlwinds coming from Africa, I fell at once upon the earth, on my face, and prayed the Lord not to let me be carried away by that whirlwind. The just man, when he hears the whispering of the devil, should straightway fall down in prayer, because *this kind* of demon *is not cast out except by prayer and fasting* [cf. Mt 17.20]. *I was troubled* when I saw coming the desolation of worldly cupidity. He does well to be troubled. The just man ought to have a troubled soul and face, whenever any desire for temporal things tries to allure him, lest it laugh at him. *My heart has failed* from the impulse of lust. The *darkness* of eternal death *has amazed me*, when *the grievous vision from the terrible land was told me*. As one key pushes out another key, so the fear of hell drives out the pleasure of lust. It is well said of the penitent man that *he departed from Bersabee, withdrew to the region of Tyre, and went on to Haran*.

See how well Tyre and Haran (anguish and the heights) go together. He who wants to reach the heights cannot do so without anguish. So the penitent who wants to climb to the fulness of eternal life must first pass through Tyre. That is why the Lord says in Luke:

*Ought not Christ to have suffered these things* (Tyre),

*and so to enter into his glory* (Haran)*?* [Lk 24.26]

What should we do, then, for the penitent who goes forth from the pit of worldly desire and journeys to the heights of heavenly happiness? The mountain is high, the ascent is very difficult, and the pain is intense. That he may not grow faint on his journey, we must make him a ladder, by which he can climb easily. It is the one referred to in this Sunday's lesson:

*Jacob saw in his sleep a ladder, standing upon the earth*, etc. [Gen 28.12ff]

**(A sermon for religious: *And thou, son of man, take wheat*.)**

10. This ladder has two sides and six rungs, to climb up. This ladder is the sanctification of the penitent, of which the Apostle says in today's Epistle:

*This is the will of God, your sanctification; that you should abstain from fornication, that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour*. [1Thess 4.3-4]

The sides of the ladder are contrition and confession. The six rungs are the six virtues in which the whole sanctification of soul and body consists: the mortification of self-will; the strictness of discipline; the virtue of abstinence; the consideration of our own weakness; the exercise of the active life; and the contemplation of heavenly glory. Of these six, the Lord spoke to Ezekiel, saying:

*And thou, O son of man... take thee wheat and barley and beans and lentils and millet and fitches, and put them in one vessel, and make thee loaves*. [Ezek 4.1,9]

The wheat, which dies when cast in the earth, means the mortification of self-will;

the barley, which has a strong stem, is the strictness of discipline;

the beans, food of fasters, are the virtue of abstinence;

the lentils, poorest and cheapest of foods, are the consideration of our weakness;

the millet, which needs a lot of tending, is the exercise of the active life;

the fitches (vetches) or wild oats, a climbing plant, is the contemplation of heavenly glory.

Because our sanctification and cleansing consists in these, we should take them and put them in our vessel, of which the Apostle says, *Let every one of you know how to possess his vessel in honour and sanctification*. From these six elements let us make ourselves loaves, so that refreshed by them we may withdraw to the region of Tyre and go on to Haran. As it says, *Jesus left those parts, and withdrew to the region of Tyre*.

**(A sermon on confession, in which five things are necessary: *Jesus went out and retired into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon*, and the four elements of a bow and a harp.)**

11. There follows: *And Sidon*. Sidon means 'hunting for sorrow'. A hunter who wants to hunt effectively needs five items of equipment: a horn to blow, a swift and lively dog, a polished sharp spear, a quiverful of arrows and a bow. He needs the horn to alarm the prey, and the dog to catch it, a spear to kill it, and a bow and arrows so that he can shoot from afar those animals he cannot get near enough to spear. This huntsman is the penitent, to whom the Father says in this Sunday's lesson:

*Take thy arms, thy quiver and bow, and go abroad; and bring me of thy hunting,*

*that I may eat and my soul may bless thee.* [cf. Gen 27.3-4]

The arms of the penitent son are the quiver and the bow. The arrows are the prickings and pains of contrition in the heart, of which Job says:

*The arrows of the Lord are in me, the rage whereof drinketh up my spirit*. [Job 6.4]

The Lord's arrows are the prickings of conscience, which mercifully wound the sinners heart, so that as he feels indignation against himself because of sin, he humbles the spirit of pride. So there is added, *The rage thereof drinketh up my spirit* (i.e. consumes my pride). The bow represents confession, and so the Lord says in Genesis:

*I will set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be the sign of a covenant*

*between me and between the earth*. [Gen 9.13]

Between God and the earth (that is, the sinner, to whom it was said: *Earth thou art and to earth shalt thou return*.) is set the bow of confession, the sign of the covenant of peace and reconciliation. See how appropriately the bow represents confession:

12. A bow has four parts: two flexible horns, a hard and unyielding middle, and a soft string which bends the horns. In the same way there are four parts to confession. The two horns are sorrow for past sins and fear of eternal punishment. The middle, hard and unbending, is the firm intention that the penitent should have never to return to his vomit. The soft string is the hope of pardon, which truly bends the two horns, sorrow and fear, from their rigidity. From a bow like this are shot *the sharp arrows of the mighty* [Ps 119.4].

The huntsman (the penitent) should have also a horn to blow, a dog and a spear. The horn is the cry of naked accusation, the dog is the bark of a biting conscience, the spear is the fulfilment of the proper punishment or satisfaction. Along with the bow of confession, the sinner should have the horn of naked accusation and the dog of a biting conscience, lest he allow anything of sin or its circumstances to remain untouched. He should also have the spear of punishment, indignation and satisfaction: to chastise himself, to feel shame and to make amends for his sins; so that he should find as many sacrifices as the offences he has committed. This is the good hunting of which the Father says to his son, *Bring me of thy hunting, that I may eat and my soul may bless thee*. This is the hunting referred to in today's Gospel: *Jesus went out, and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon*.

**(A sermon against the curious and those straying after worldly matters: *Dina went out*.)**

13. *And behold, a woman of Canaan, who came out of those coasts, crying out, said to him: Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously troubled by a devil*. [Mt 15.22]

Notice how the Canaanite mother first goes out, and then prays for her daughter, when Jesus had withdrawn to the region of Tyre and Sidon. It is when the sinner has gone out from the world, and from the insatiable appetite of his flesh; when he has retired to the region of Tyre (the anguish he feels in contrition) and Sidon (the hunting he must do in Confession), that the Canaanite woman, the sinful soul which recognises the evil she has done previously, begins to cry out and say: *Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David*. This should be the proper prayer of the penitent soul, who follows David's example in doing true penance after committing adultery and murder, and is converted to penance. She says, *Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David*, as if to say, "Lord, you took flesh from the family and tribe of David, so that you might bestow the grace of forgiveness, and extend the hand of mercy, upon those converted sinners who follow David's example and hope in your mercy, and who do penance." So, *Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David*.

14. *Who answered her not a word*. [Mt 15.23]

How mysterious are God's counsels! How fathomless are the depths of eternal wisdom! The Word- who was in the beginning with the Father, and through whom all things were made [cf. Jn 1.1,3]- answered not a word to the Canaanite woman, the penitent sinner. The Word, *who made the tongues of infants eloquent* [Wisd 10.21], and *gives a mouth and wisdom* [Lk 21.15], answered not a word! O Word of the Father, creating and restoring all things, governing and sustaining all things, answer me at least one word- me, a wretched woman; me, a penitent! Let me prove to you through your own prophet, Isaiah, that you should answer. Through him, the Father made a promise to sinners concerning you, saying:

*The word which shall go forth from my mouth:*

*it shall not return to me void,*

*but it shall do whatsoever I please*

*and shall prosper in the things for which I sent it.* [Is 55.11]

What has the Father willed? In fact, that you should receive the penitent and answer him a word of mercy. Did you not say: *My meat is to do the will of him who sent me*? [Jn 4.34]. *Have mercy on me*, then, *son of David*: answer me a word, O Word of the Father.

I will prove by the authority of your prophet Zechariah that you should have mercy and answer. This is what he prophesied of you:

*In that day there shall be a fountain open to the house of David*

*and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem:*

*for the washing of the sinner and of the unclean woman*. [Zech 13.1]

O fountain of love and mercy, who were born of that blessed ground, the Virgin Mary, who was of the house and family of David: wash away the filth of the sinner and the unclean woman! *Have mercy on me*, then, *son of David; my daughter is grievously troubled by a devil*.

Why does the Word answer not a word? Surely, to incite the soul of the penitent to greater contrition, to a more piercing sorrow. So the Bride says of him in the Canticles:

*I sought him and found him not: I called, and he did not answer me*. [Cant 5.6]

15. Let us see more clearly what is grieving this Canaanite woman. *My daughter*, she says*, is grievously troubled by a devil*. There is a **concordance** to this troubling in the Office Over what sorrow does this Canaanite woman grieve? Let us take a closer look reading for this Sunday, where it says:

*And Dina the daughter of Lia went out to see the women of that country. And when Sichem, the son of Hemer the Hivite, the prince of that land, saw her, he was in love with her: and took her away, and lay with her, ravishing the virgin. And his soul was fast knit unto her*. [Gen 34.1-3]

This is how *my daughter is grievously troubled by a devil*. Lia means 'laborious' and Dina means 'cause or 'judgement'. Lia is the soul of the penitent, who labours insistently at the work of penance. She says, with the Prophet, *I have laboured in my groaning* [Ps 6.7]. She is the woman of Canaan (meaning 'business'). The business of the penitent soul is to despise the world, afflict the flesh, and to weep for past sins and never again commit anything to weep for. The daughter of this Canaanite, of Lia, is a person's own mind or conscience, and it is well named 'Dina' ('cause' or 'judgement') because one should lay the cause of one's sins before the judge (the priest), and freely accept the judgement and sentence handed out. And here it should be noted that by the 'mind' or 'conscience' of a person I mean nothing other than the penitent's own soul. In sacred Scripture, different persons very often represent one and the same thing; so that here the Canaanite woman and her daughter, morally, signify the soul of one penitent.

16. Of this soul is said: *Dina went out to see the women of that country*.

The women of that country represent the beauty, abundance, vanity and pleasure of the temporal things of this world. They are called 'women' because they weaken men's minds, just as in the third book of Kings we read that *Women turned away the heart of*

*Solomon* [3(1)Kg 11.3]. Beauty and temporal abundance beguile the heart of the wise man. The unhappy soul goes out to see these women when she takes delight in the abundance and beauty of temporal things. Then the unhappy outcome is what follows:

*When Sichem, the son of Hemor the Hivite, the prince of that land, saw her, he was in love with her*.

Sichem means ‘labour’ and Hemor is ‘an ass’; Hivite is ‘wild’ or ‘worst’.

Sichem is the devil, who is always labouring to do evil*. I have gone round about the earth, and walked through it* [Job 2.2]. He is called ‘son of Hemor the Hivite’, because by the stupidity and ferocity of pride, from being an angel he became a devil; from a son of the highest glory he became a son of eternal death. He is called prince ‘of the land’, in reference to those who are ‘earthly minded’ [cf. Phil 3.19]. *The Prince of this world is cast out*, says the Lord [Jn 12.31]. When he sees the unhappy soul, who ought to be bearing the cause and judgement of her sins, wandering through temporal vanities, he does what it says: *he made love to her, took her away, lay with her and ravished the virgin, and his soul was fast knit to her*.

The devil ‘makes love’, when he suggests sin to her; he ‘takes her away’ when she consents to his suggestion; he ‘lies with her and ravishes her virginity’ when the evil thought about produces an overt action; his ‘soul is knit to her’ when she is held captive and bound with the web of evil custom. See how grievously my daughter is troubled by the devil*! Have mercy on me, then, thou son of David, for my daughter is grievously troubled by a devil*, Sichem the son of Hamor the Hivite. And the Lord, *whose mercies are without number*, had pity on the daughter troubled by the devil, and wonderfully set her free.

17. And so follows, in the same passage of Genesis:

*Two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, the brothers of Dina, taking their swords, entered boldly into the city, and slew all the men; and they killed also Hamor and Sichem, and took away their sister Dina, out of Sichem’s house*. [Gen 36.25-26]

Simeon means ‘hearing sadness’, and represents contrition in the heart; Levi means ‘addition’, and represents confession by the mouth, which should be added to contrition of heart. These two sons of Jacob (the penitent man), brothers of Dina (his soul), must sieze the swords of divine love and fear, and slay the devil, his pride, and everything that belongs to him (sin and its attendant circumstances); thus are they able to free their sister, the soul, who is held captive in the devil’s house and bound with the chain of evil custom.

Let us pray then, beloved, the Lord Jesus: that by his holy mercy he will grant us to go out from the vanity of the world, and so withdraw to the region of Tyre and Sidon, contrition and confession, that our daughter-soul may be freed from the devil and his

temptations, and placed in the blessedness of the eternal kingdom. May he grant this, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Let every man say: Amen.

NOTES

[1] cf. HORACE, *Epistolae*, I,1,10

[2] cf. ISIDORE, *Synonimorum* II,16; PL 83.849

[3] AUGUSTINE, *Regula* 6; PL 32.1381

[4] GREGORY, *Moralium* XXI,2,4; PL 76.190

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

**(The Gospel for the third Sunday of Lent: *Jesus was casting out a devil*, which is divided into five clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon on the usefulness of preaching: *Whensoever the evil spirit from the Lord*.)**

1. *At that time: Jesus was casting out a devil, and the same was dumb. And when he had cast out the devil, the dumb spoke; and the multitudes were in admiration of it*. [Lk 11.14]

We read in the first book of Kings:

*Whensoever the evil spirit from the Lord was upon Saul, David took his harp, and played with his hand; and Saul was refreshed, and was better, for the evil spirit departed from him*. [1Kg(Sm) 16.23]

The evil spirit from the Lord is the devil. He is 'from the Lord', because he was created by Him; he is evil because of his own malice. He was changed from light-bearer to dark-bearer, from angel to devil. That is why he is called 'devil', the 'outcast'. He seizes Saul (whose name means 'abuser'), the sinner whom, as Job says,

*God hath given* [him] *place for penance; and he abuseth it unto pride*, [Job 24.23]

when he draws him on from sin to sin. But David (that is to say, the preacher) must take his harp, the most sweet music of his preaching, and strike it with the hand of his operation; and so the sweetness of the harp, the power of the Lord's preaching, will lessen the sinner's fever and drive the devil from him. And this is told in today's Gospel, *Jesus was casting out a devil*.

2. There are four parts to the Gospel, and for God's honour and the benefit of our hearers we will try to present a brief sermon on each.

The first part begins: *Jesus was casting out a devil*.

The second begins: *When a strong man armed*.

The third begins, *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man*.

The fourth begins, *A certain woman from the crowd, lifting up her voice*.

Similarly with the story from Genesis in this week's Office readings:

The first part deals with the selling of Joseph into slavery.

The second tells of his imprisonment, and the interpretation of the butler's and baker's dreams.

The third tells of the seven cows, the seven ears of corn, and the seven years of famine.

The fourth tells of the freeing of all Egypt by the industry of Joseph himself.

In the name of Jesus Christ, then, we will speak of the first part of the Gospel.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon for penitents or enclosed religious: *Joseph was sent from the valley of Hebron*, and on the nature of the curlew bird.)**

3. *Jesus was casting out a devil*. See how the Lord Jesus worked four miracles in a single man: he gave sight to the blind (for Matthew reports that the demoniac was blind too); he made the dumb speak and the deaf hear; and he freed him from a devil. Let us see how the Lord does this every day, spiritually, for sinners in Holy Church; and let us see the moral significance of each.

*Jesus was casting out a devil*. Note carefully that, just as this demoniac had lost the natural power of the three principal senses, nobler than the rest (seeing, speaking, hearing), so the sinner possessed by the devil through mortal sin loses the spiritual power in those three senses of his soul which are higher and more important than the rest, seeing, speaking and hearing. By 'seeing', we mean knowledge; by 'speaking', confession; and by 'hearing', obedience. He sees clearly, who recognises his own wickedness. He speaks rightly, who starkly and openly confesses the wickedness he knows. He hears acutely, who freely obeys the voice of his confessor.

There is a **concordance** to these three things in the first part of the Office reading for this Sunday, where it says that Joseph, being sent from the valley of Hebron, came to Sichem, and from Sichem to Dothain [cf. Gen 37.14-17]. Joseph means 'growing', Hebron is 'vision', Sichem is 'labour' and Dothain is 'failing'. Joseph is the penitent who grows in God's sight, to the extent that he is lessened in his own eyes. So the Lord said

to Saul:

*When thou wast a little one in thine own eyes, I made the the head of the tribes of Israel*. [1Kg(Sm) 15.17]

In the valley of Hebron (vision) there is the recognition of sin; in Sichem, the labour of confession; in Dothain, the ceasing of self-will.

So the penitent, sent from the valley of Hebron, comes to Sichem. The vale of Hebron, or vision, is the recognition of sin; as Jeremiah says: *See thy ways in the valley* [Jer 2.23]. In the valley, the double humility which is both external and internal, you should 'see your ways', know your sins by which you, as by several roads, are heading for hell. The psalmist says:

*I have thought on my ways; and turned my feet unto thy testimonies*. [Ps 118.59]

And Jeremiah again:

*Know thou and see* [i.e. recognize] *that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee, to have left the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not with thee, saith the Lord, the God of Hosts*. [Jer 2.19]

and again:

*Lift up thy eyes on high, and see where thou hast not prostituted thyself*. [Jer 3.2]

Note the words, 'on high'. Alas! How few there are who lift up their eyes on high. Nearly all look sideways, like squinters. Without a doubt, the person who sees things straight is the one who recognizes his own wrong-doing, just as he committed it, and confesses it straight out too, just as he sees it, down to the last detail. So lift up your eyes and see straight, not sideways! Do not be embarrassed, do not be afraid! Those feelings often prevent you from seeing straight. It is said that there is a certain bird, and if it looks with the direct gaze of its eyes upon a sick person, that sick person will be altogether cured; but if the bird turns away its eyes from the face of the sick man, or only looks sideways, that is a sign of death. So the sinner, if he lifts up his eyes on high, and sees and recognizes his sins, believe me, *He shall surely live, he shall not die* [Ezek 33.15]. But if he looks sideways at them, disguising or glossing over his sins as he confesses them, it is a sign and indication of eternal damnation. So, *lift up your eyes on high, and see*, recognize where- in so great a misery- now you are prostituted, who previously were *mistress of the nations*- the vices- *prince of provinces*- the five senses- *being made tributary to the devil and to sin* [cf. Lam 1.1].

4. It is a good thing then, dear brothers, to live in the valley of Hebron, to see and know first our guilt and wickedness, and then to come to Sichem, labour, to a confession which

is truly labour and sorrow. As the Prophet Micah says,

*Be in pain and labour, O daughter of Sion, as a woman that bringeth forth*. [Mic 4.10]

O daughter, O soul- who are and who should be daughter of Sion, the heavenly Jerusalem- be in pain in contrition, and in labour enough, like a woman in childbirth, in confession. Yes, like a woman in childbirth! Just as a woman giving birth labours and is in pain, so the sinner must labour and be in pain in confession; like the female deer who gives birth in pain and labour, as Job says:

*Hinds bow themselves to bring forth young; and they cast them and send forth roarings*. [Job 39.3]

The hinds are penitents, who ought to bow down and humble themselves before the priest, and bring forth their sins, and give out the most bitter groans. But alas! alas! How many there are today who bring forth, not like hinds, but like horses. Natural History says that horses feel no pain when they bear, and that the smoke of a quenched lamp makes them miscarry. So some sinners, when the confess, bring forth their sins without labour or pain, whereas the Lord says,

*a woman, when she is in labour, hath sorrow*, [Jn 16.21]

and when the lamp of faith is extinguished in such folk, the smoke of concupiscence arises, and they miscarry, bringing forth sin. Wherefore St James says:

*When concupiscence hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin. But sin, when it is completed, begetteth death*. [Jas 1.15]

Hear how holy Job (that is ‘sorrowing’) *came from the valley of Hebron to Sichem*, when he said:

*I will not spare my mouth, I will speak in the affliction of my spirit:*

*I will talk with the bitterness of my soul*. [Job 7.11]

There is a brief, but very useful, form of confession! He spares not his mouth, who nakedly and openly confesses his sins and the relevant circumstances. He speaks from the affliction of his spirit, who with a broken heart and contrite spirit accuses himself, blames himself and judges himself. He talks with the bitterness of his soul, who keeps nothing back, but time and time again renews his sorrow. Putting himself entirely in the priest’s hands, he says with Saul:

*Lord, Lord, what wouldst thou have me do?* [Acts 9.6]

So, appropriately, there is added: *And from Sichem he came to Dothain* (‘failing’). The penitent should not rely upon himself, but should freely obey the instructions of his confessor, his superior; saying with Samuel:

*Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth*. [1Kg(Sm) 3.10]

All of this makes clear what the penitent should see, speak and hear. Yet because whatever is said can be even better understood when contrasted with its opposite, let us see what we can say about the opposites of these three things.

**(A sermon on the blindness of the sinner: *As soon as Joseph came*, and on the property of the swan.)**

5. *Jesus was casting out a devil*. This devil is the wild beast referred to in today’s lesson, where Jacob says:

*An evil wild beast hath eaten him; a beast hath devoured Joseph*. [Gen 37.33]

Let us see how this beast devours Joseph. We said above that the devil brings three evils upon the possessed man: he takes away light, and deprives him of voice and hearing. Just so, from the sinner in mortal sin, he takes away light (lest he recognize his sin), he deprives him of voice (lest he disclose his sin in confession), he stops his ears*, which will not hear the voice of the wizard that charmeth wisely* [cf. Ps 57.6]. To these three things there is a **concordance** in the Genesis story:

*As soon as Joseph came to his brethren, they forthwith stript him of his outside coat, that was of divers colours; and cast him into an old pit, where there was no water... and they drew him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ismaelites; and they led him into Egypt*. [Gen 37.23-24,28]

Notice these three expressions: they stripped off his coat, they cast him into a pit, and they sold him.

The ‘outside coat of divers colours’ represents knowledge of sins. Towards the end of St John’s Gospel we are told that:

*Peter girt his coat about him (for he was naked) and cast himself into the sea*. [Jn 21.7]

Peter was indeed naked, when he denied Christ at the voice of the maidservant; but he girded his coat about him when he recognized the guilt of his threefold denial. Then he was truly Peter, ‘the one who recognizes’, and so he cast himself into the sea, into bitter weeping. So Luke tells us:

*Peter remembered the word of Jesus, as he said: Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny*

*me thrice. And going out, he wept bitterly*. [Lk 22.61-62]

In this same way the sinner should gird himself, recognize his iniquity, and cast himself into the sea, the bitterness of contrition. However, there are many today who gird themselves, who recognize their fault, but are unwilling to cast themselves into the sea, because they refuse to do penance for their sins.

Joseph's coat is ankle-length and many-coloured. Our soul's coat, knowledge of our sins, should also be 'ankle-length', covering everything. While we should daily acknowledge and lament our sins, all through our life, we should do so especially at our life's end, even more devoutly and diligently. We should recognize and confess them in general and in particular. We should imitate the swan, which, when it dies, dies singing. This is supposed to be due to a certain feather in its throat; and, even so, that song is painful to it. The white swan is the converted sinner, made whiter than snow. At the point of death he should sing devoutly, recognizing his sin in bitterness of heart. The feather in the swan's throat is knowledge and confession of sin in the mouth of the just. From it should proceed a song that is painful, but very fruitful. In this way the long coat is also many-coloured, decorated with a variety of virtues. In the end, the song is all praise. But alas, alas! The devils strip Joseph of this precious coat, when they blind the eyes of the unhappy soul, taking away the knowledge of his wickedness, lest he see and recognize the shame and disgrace of his nakedness.

Then, secondly, they cast him into an old pit, where there was no water. The old, waterless pit is the mind of the sinner who has *grown old in evil days* [Dan 13.52]. It contains no water of confession, no tears of compunction. The sinner is shut up by the devils in the pit of obstinacy, lest he be able to get out into the light of confession. So, in the fourth book of Kings, we read how Nabuchodonosor put out the eyes of Sedecias, and bound him with chains, and brought him to Babylon [cf. 4(2)Kg 25.7]. In the same way the devil plucks out the sinner's eyes, lest he recognize his wickedness, and then binds him with the chains of bad habit, and puts him in the prison of obstinacy, lest he get out into the light of confession.

Thirdly, they sold him to the Ismaelite merchants, who led him into Egypt. The sinner is sold and taken into Egypt when he withdraws himself from the Church's preaching, and does not submit to the counsel of good people, *stopping his ear lest he hear the voice that charms him wisely*. Truly, someone like that is a demoniac possessed by the devil, for he will not see the guilt of his iniquity, nor speak in confession, nor hear the words of eternal life. But what does the good and kind Jesus do?

**(A sermon on the Passion of Christ: *Be ye followers of God*.)**

6. Luke says: *Jesus was casting out a devil*. Jesus casts out the devil from sinners when he prints on them the title of his love, and puts in their hearts the seal of his Passion. Just so, St. Paul says in today's Epistle:

*Be ye therefore followers of God, as most dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us and hath delivered himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odour of sweetness*. [Eph 5.1-2]

In this text there are two points to note: the love of Christ and his Passion. These two draw out the devil. Because of the exceeding love with which he loved us*, he delivered himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odour of sweetness*. The scent of this evening sacrifice, the Passion of Jesus Christ, casts out every devil. Thus it says in the Book of Tobias that:

*Tobias took out of his bag part of the liver, and laid it upon burning coals. Then the angel Raphael took the devil, and bound him in the desert of upper Egypt*. [Tob 8.2-3]

The liver (which is the organ by which we love) stands for the love of Christ, and the live coals are his Passion. We put part of the liver, if not the whole liver, on burning coals when we recall how the Son of God, our love ( and I might say, 'our liver'), solely for love of us was laid on the living coals of his Cross and sharp nails, as an odour of sweetness. Believe me, brothers, this odour of sweetness, the memorial of our Lord's Passion, casts out every devil. If we do this, Raphael ('healing'), who is Jesus Christ himself, our cure and angel of great counsel, will seize the devil and bind him in the desert of upper Egypt, so that he may not harm us any more.

Well said, then, *Jesus was casting out a devil*! When he had cast the devil out, the man saw, spoke and heard, and the crowds were full of wonder. No wonder! For with the ceasing of the cause, the effect ceased too. When the devil of mortal sin is cast out of the sinner's heart, immediately he begins to see (know), speak (confess) and hear (obey). So the Apostle says at the end of today's Epistle:

*For you were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light. For the fruit of the light is in all goodness, and justice, and truth*. [Eph 5.8-9]

Note those three words: 'in all goodness'- the knowledge of sin, without which no-one can attain goodness, whereby the good penitent said: *I acknowledge my wickedness* [Ps 50.5]; 'in justice'- the confession of sin. What greater justice than to accuse oneself? Solomon says: *The just is first accuser of himself* [Prov 18.17]; 'and truth'- obedience, which is freely to obey the precepts of Truth: Jesus Christ and his representative.

Let us render thanks to Jesus Christ the Son of God, who cast out the devil, enlightened the blind, and made the dumb to speak and the deaf to hear. Let us all together, with devout minds, pray and humbly beseech Christ himself, to cast out mortal sin from the heart of every Christian, and to pour into them the grace of God, so that each may know his iniquity and reveal it in confession, and faithfully obey the advice and instructions of his confessor. May Jesus Christ himself grant this to us and to you. To him be honour, majesty, dominion, praise and glory for ever and ever. Let every creature say: Amen!

**(The second clause.**

**First, a sermon for the preacher: *His bow rested upon the strong*.)**

7. *When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things are in peace which he possesseth. But if a stronger than he come upon him and overcome him, he will take away all his armour wherein he trusted and will distribute his spoils*. [Lk 11.21-22]

In the blessing of Joseph, towards the end of Genesis, it says:

*His bow rested upon the strong*. [Gen 49.24]

Joseph means ‘increase’, and he stands for the preacher who should daily increase the Church by his preaching, so that he may say with Joseph:

*God hath made me grow in the land of my poverty*. [Gen 41.52]

In the land of poverty- that is to say, in the exile of our wretched earthly pilgrimage- God makes the preacher grow when, through him, he makes the number of the faithful to increase, to the preacher’s merit. His bow is preaching; and as a bow has two parts, the wood and the string, so in preaching there must be the wood of the Old Testament and the string of the New. Of this bow, Job says:

*My bow in my hand shall be repaired*. [Job 29.20]

The bow in his hand is strengthened when preaching is supported by action. According to St Bernard[1], "For the fruitful preaching of God, it is not enough, unless one precedes the sound of the voice with the witness of work." This bow must rest on the strong, not on the weak; not on the preacher, but on Christ, so that all may be attributed to Him without whom the preacher can achieve nothing good. He is really ‘the strong man’, because he binds the strong devil. That is why it says in this Gospel, *When a strong man armed keepeth his court* .. We will expound this second clause of the Gospel, first allegorically and then morally.

**(A sermon on the devil’s armour and his warfare: *There went out a man baseborn*, and on the spider’s web and its property.)**

8. The strong man armed is the devil. Of him and his armour, the book of Kings says:

*And there went out a man baseborn from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath of Geth, whose height was six cubits and a span. And he had a helmet of brass upon his head; and he was clothed with a coat of mail with hooks ... And he had greaves of brass on his legs, and a buckler of brass covered his shoulders. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver’s beam*. [1Kg(Sm) 16.4-7]

Goliath means ‘crossing over’, or ‘changing shape’, and he represents the devil, who crosses over from virtue to vice, from joy to punishment. Every day he changes himself into an angel of light [cf. 2Cor 11.14], to deceive man. He is ‘of Geth’, a wine-press, because the devil squeezes man under the pressure of tribulation, as grapes are squeezed in a wine-press, so that the good may be stored like wine in the cellar of eternal life, but the bad may be cast like sour grapes onto the dunghill of eternal damnation. He goes out from the camp of the Philistines (meaning, ‘falling from drink’), of sinners who, being drunk with love of the world, fall from God’s grace in their guilt, and from guilt fall in ruin into hell. The devil dwells in their camp, because the heart of the wicked man is the devil’s guest-house. The Gloss on Habbakuk*, I saw the tents of Ethiopia for their iniquity* [Hab 3.7], says, "Those who labour for riches and honours become the hospice of devils, whereas they should be the Temple of God."

Goliath was ‘baseborn’, the word meaning someone partly of noble, partly of common origin. The devil was noble by his creation, ignoble from his vices. He is said to have been *in height, six cubits and a span*. We read in Ezekiel:

*The man whose appearance was like brass had a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed in his hand with which he measured the temple; and the measuring reed was six cubits and a handbreadth*. [Ezek 40.3,5]

The measure of the temple is the same as that of Goliath. The measure of the temple consists in the different degrees in the Church, against which the devil has his own measure. By the six cubits we understand the works of mercy, the works of the active life; by the span, those of the contemplative life, of which we have barely a foretaste in this life, which is why it is called a ‘handbreadth’. The devil stretches himself against both actives and contemplatives.

*And a helmet of brass was on his head*. All Goliath’s armour was of brass, like the armour of the devil. The devil’s armour is formed of those who defend the devil, lest he be slain in his wicked deeds. They are brazen, strong enough to defend his every part. So Job says:

*His bones are like pipes of brass*. [Job 40.13]

The bones support the flesh; the bones of the devil are those who support others in evil. They are like pipes of brass, because like pipes they have sound only, and not sense. They speak words, but do no good. As brass resonates when struck, so these folk murmur at the blow of rebuke.

*And he wore a coat of mail with hooks*, to fasten blemish to blemish. The devil’s breastplate is all those evil folk inseparably joined to him. As Job says;

*His body is like molten shields, shut close up with scales pressing one upon another.*

*One is joined to another, and not so much as any air can come between them; they stick one to another and they hold. one another fast, and shall not be separated*. [Job 41.6-8]

The devil's 'scales', his defenders, press upon one another, because one defends another. "Concord is a great thing for the weak."[2] They are so joined together that not a breath of divine grace, nor of dominical preaching, can get between them. In the same way that they are accomplices in evil here, so hereafter they will share together an eternal punishment.

*He had greaves of brass upon his legs*. The greaves are excuses made for lust. When the lustful defends the sin of lust, he as it were protects his loins with greaves, to his greater damnation. Job says: *The shades cover his shadow* [Job 40.17]. The shades, dark and gloomy, are the lustful who cover the devil's shadow when they defend their lust, sleeping and taking their rest under him.

*And a buckler of brass covered his shoulders*. The devil's shield is those who repel from themselves the arrows of preaching, of which the Lord says in Ezekiel:

*Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious people that hath revolted from me. Speak my words to them, if perhaps they will hear and forbear: for they provoke me to anger ... But they will not hearken to thee, because they will not hearken to me*. [Ezek 2.3,7; 3.7]

9. *And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam*. By help of this staff, the web is woven. This is evil temptation, by means of which the devil weaves the web of wickedness. The devil spins his web like a spider, of which Natural History tells us: "The spider first puts forth the thread of her web, and fastens it at the ends. Then she weaves in the middle, between these ends, and so produces a web strong enough, in a conveniently prepared place, for hunting. She comes into the middle, as one lying in wait for some small beast. If some fly, or the like, falls in- at once the spider moves, leaving her place and starting to bind it and wind it round with the web, until she reaches the point where the prey is helpless. Then, when she feels hungry, she sucks the moisture from it; and without that moisture she cannot live."

In the same way, when the devil wants to catch a man, he first puts out the slender thread of subtle thought, and fixes it at the ends, the senses of the body. By this, he can craftily find out to which vice the man is most susceptible. Then, in the midst- the heart- he weaves a web of temptation, sufficiently strong and in a conveniently prepared place for hunting. He comes to the middle, as one lying in wait for some small creature. The devil finds no member, in all the human body, which is so suitable for hunting, lying in wait and deceiving, as the human heart: for that is the very source of life. And if he sees any fly- anything carnal, that may be called a fly- fall into the web of his suggestion by the consent of the heart, then straightway he begins to bind it with all sorts of

temptations, to wind it in darkness until it becomes helpless and enfeebled in mind. So he bears away that fly, the sinner, to a place where he keeps what he has caught. The devil's own place is the commission of an evil action, and in it he puts what he has ensnared by the web of temptation. So he sucks their moisture, the compunction of the soul; for while the soul has that, the devil cannot hurt it. How appropriate the words: *The staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam*!

**(A sermon on Christ's armour and his victory: He put on justice as a breastplate.)**

10. This, then, is how the devil is armed. It is of him that it is said, *When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things are in peace which he possesseth*. Before Christ's coming, the devil's court was the whole world, not in virtue of creation, but because of the fall of our first parent, for whose disobedience the devil had power over his posterity, by God's permission. He possessed everything in peace, because neither Moses, nor Elias, nor Jeremias, nor any of the Old Testament Fathers, was able to drive him out of his court. But *from the royal throne*, from the bosom of the Father, *a fierce conqueror came*, as the Book of Wisdom tells [Wisd 18.15], *and leaped down into the land of destruction*, which the devil had destroyed, upon the joined feet of divinity and humanity. So, as the Apostle says to the Hebrews, *he delivered those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to servitude* [Heb 2.15].

So there follows: *But if a stronger than he cometh upon him and overcome him, he will take away all his armour wherein he trusted, and will distribute his spoils*. This stronger man is Jesus Christ, of whose armour Isaiah says:

*He put on justice as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head.*

*He put on the garments of vengeance and was clad with zeal as with a cloak*. [Is 59.17]

The breastplate of Jesus Christ is justice, whereby he justly expelled the devil from the court which he had possessed in peace. Because the devil stretched out his hand against Christ, in whom he had nothing, he justly deserved to lose Adam and his posterity, in whom he seemed to have something. Whoever abuses a privilege granted him, deserves to lose his privilege.

*And a helmet of salvation upon his head*. His head is the Divinity. *The head of Jesus Christ is God*, says the Apostle [1Cor 11.3]. The helmet is his humanity. The head hidden beneath the helmet is the Divinity hidden under the humanity, which *worked salvation in the midst of the earth* [Ps 73.12]. He put on also the garments of vengeance, and was clad with zeal as with a cloak. Jesus Christ took the garments of our humanity to this end, that he might take vengeance on our enemy the devil, and free his spouse, our soul, from his hands. Thus, if a stronger than he cometh upon him and overcome him, he will take away his armour. The devil's armour is what we described earlier. Christ took it all away from him when he made children of grace out of children of wrath. David cast down Goliath with a sling and a stone [cf. 1Kg(Sm) 17.49-50], and in the same way

Christ conquered the devil with the sling of humanity and the stone of his Passion. So David says:

*Take hold of arms and shield; and rise up to help me*. [Ps 34.2]

Take up arms, O Son of God, your human limbs; and a shield, your Cross; that so armed you may overcome the strong devil who held the human race captive in prison.

11. This is our Joseph, who was nailed to the cross as in a prison, bound hand and foot between two thieves. Joseph the son of Jacob would not give into the foul lust of a harlot. He fled, leaving his cloak in her hands, whereby she had tried to hold him; and so she accused him to Potiphar her husband, saying that he had tried to seduce her. Angered, he put him in prison, where the cup-bearer and the baker of the king of Egypt were held captive. By rightly interpreting their dreams, he gave them a true and certain prediction of what would happen. The cup-bearer would leave prison for the king's palace; the baker would be taken from prison to be hanged on the gallows [cf. Gen 39.7-20; 40.1-22]. Similarly, Jesus Christ the Son of God would not consent to the faithless harlot, the Jewish Synagogue, which would have held him by the cloak of legal observances and the tradition of the elders. They covered themselves with these, as with a cloak, to appear righteous before men. He, however, cast off the cloak, the rite of legal observance, and fled; because he was Lord of the Law, not its slave. When the Synagogue saw itself despised, it accused him to Potiphar. Potiphar means 'a mouth inclined to cut up', and he represents Pilate, who inclined his mouth to cut up Jesus, that is, to scourge him: *I will scourge him and hand him over to you* [cf. Mt 27.26; Lk 23.16].

The harlot Synagogue accused our Joseph to this man, saying:

*We have found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar ... He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Judaea, beginning from Galilee to this place*. [Lk 23.2,5]

Pilate, giving in to the harlot's words, gave sentence in favour of their petition, and handed Jesus over to be crucified. Nailed to the Cross between two thieves, he resembled Joseph bound between the cup-bearer and the baker. One thief (I might more truly call him a holy confessor, because he confessed Christ, when Peter denied him) was truly the cup-bearer. Inebriated by the wine of compunction, he offered the Lord the golden cup of faith, hope and charity, saying:

*Remember me, Lord, when thou shalt come into thy kingdom*. [Lk 23.42]

So he was found worthy to hear:

*Amen, I say to thee: This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise*. [Ibid, v 43]

The other, faithless, thief blasphemed Christ, saying,

*If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us*.

He was the baker, who by baker's skill made bread, not (I'd say) from wheat, but from the bran of ill-will and the water of faithlessness, and baked it in the oven of despair. So from the Cross, as from prison, he deserved to go to the gallows of eternal damnation.

12. There follows: *And he will distribute his spoils*. The devil's spoils are the souls of the just, which were held in darkness because of our first parent's disobedience. Christ distributed these spoils when he despoiled hell, and bestowed glory on each soul in the heavenly kingdom. Alternatively, the spoils are the Apostles and other disciples of Jesus Christ, concerning which the Father said to the Son, in Isaiah:

*Hasten to take away the spoils; make haste to take away the prey*. [Is 8.3]

O Son, hasten to the Incarnation! Take away the spoils by your preaching. Make haste to take away the devil's prey in your Passion! Christ distributed these spoils when he gave some to be apostles, some evangelists, some teachers of the Church. As the prophet says:

*The king of powers is of the beloved, of the beloved:*

*and the beauty of the house shall divide spoils.* [Ps 67.13]

O beloved faithful! The king of the beloved Jesus Christ, the Father who is king of the heavenly powers, will give his beloved Son (of whom he said, *This is my beloved Son*) to divide the spoils of beauty- apostles, evangelists, teachers; that is, for the beauty of the house, the Church, that they may make it beautiful. May he, who overcame the devil and took away his armour, make us sharers of that beauty: Jesus Christ, who is blessed, who is God above all things, for ever and ever. Amen.

**(On the third clause.**

**First, a sermon against the proud: *I saw a ram with horns*, and on the arrangement of horns in animals, and their meaning.)**

13. *When a strong man armed keepeth his court*. The strong man armed is the spirit of pride, armed with uplifted horns to brandish and to fight the whole world. As we read in Daniel:

*I saw a ram pushing with his horns against the west and against the north and against the south; and no beasts could withstand him nor be delivered out of his hands; and he did according to his own will and became great*. [Dan 8.4]

This ram represents the spirit of pride, which butts against west and north and south with uplifted horns. The west denotes poor and lesser folk, who lack the heat of strength and power. The north denotes equals (in Isaiah, the devil says: *I will place my seat in the north, and I will be like,* (that is, *equal to*) *the Most High* [cf. Is 14.13-14]). The south denotes greater folk, ablaze with the heat of dignity and power. The horned ram, the spirit of rampant pride, ramps against the west, treading down the poor and humble; against the north, despising his equals; and against the south, mocking and deriding his betters. And no beasts could withstand him, nor be delivered out of his hands. O horned pride, who can be delivered from your hands? You even raised up Lucifer- *the seal of resemblance, whose covering was every precious stone* [Ezek 28.12-13]- to the very pinnacle of pride. You were born in heaven, and so you usually live in heavenly minds, hiding beneath sack-cloth and ashes!

From the horns of this beast, David the prophet prayed to be saved, saying:

*Save me from the lion's mouth: and my lowness from the horns of the unicorns*. [Ps 21.22]

The unicorn represents the singularity of pride, because the proud man wants to be alone in pre-eminence. "Power will suffer no partner."[3] David detested pride, saying: *O Lord my God, If I have done this thing!* [Ps 7.4]. See how, to indicate the greatness of his detestation, he would not even call it by its own name! God hates pride above all things, and so Peter says:

*God resisteth the proud, but to the humble he giveth grace*. [1Pt 5.5]

Job says of the unicorn:

*Shall the rhinoceros* (or: *monoceros*, 'unicorn') *be willing to serve thee, or will it stay at thy crib?* [Job 39.9]

as if to say, "Not thine!" The proud man cannot consider the Lord's crib, that he was placed in a crib for us.

14. Some animals have backward-curving horns. This is an image of the pride which, in some people, is broken down by their lust. They think themselves high and mighty, but are brought low by the lust of the flesh. As Hosea says,

*The pride of Israel shall answer in his face*. [Hos 5.5]

It often happens that someone, who will not recognize his hidden pride, is brought to shame when it is revealed through the vice of lust.

There are also animals with forward-pointing horns, like unicorns. This represents the pride of the hypocrite, who cloaks his pride under an appearance of religious observance. As Ecclesiasticus says,

*There is one that humbleth himself wickedly, and his interior is full of deceit*.[Ecclus 19.23]

St Gregory[4] says: "Humility is such a precious thing, that pride would like to be clothed in it, lest its own vileness be seen."

Some animals have horns which turn towards each other, like the wild cow, representing a pride in some which is broken in itself. Isaiah says:

*The Lord of hosts shall break the earthen vessel with terror,*

*and the tall of stature shall be cut down, and the lofty shall be humbled*. [Is 10.33]

The earthen vessel is the mind of a proud sinner, made of clay and breakable, filled with the water of conceit. The Lord breaks it by striking the terror of the Last Judgement into the mind of that proud man. In that judgement, the ‘tall of stature’, who now seem to stand so securely, will be cut down by the sentence;

*Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire*; [cf. Mt 25.41]

and the ‘lofty’ who now go about with stretched out necks and wanton glances, and move with a set pace [cf. Is 3.16], will be humbled to hell, and to the deepest pit [cf. Is 14.15], in which is no refreshing water.

Again, some animals have horns that go straight up, like the deer. This represents that pride which, in some, arises from religion alone. This is the most dangerous sort, and Isaiah says of it to religious (whom it most benefits to be outstanding in humility), speaking under the figure of ‘the valley of vision’:

*What aileth thee also, that thou too art wholly gone up to the housetops?* [Is 22.1]

as if to say, It is tolerable if worldly folk seek the highest places; but what does it look like if you religious, that see so much, go looking for promotion?

**(A sermon on humility: *But if a stronger than he cometh*.)**

15. Let us say, then: *When a strong man armed keepeth his court*. The ‘court’ of horned pride is the proud man’s heart, wherein pride chooses its special dwelling. And just as the heart is the origin of the veins, and the primary creator of blood, so from the heart’s pride flows every evil; for

*Pride is the beginning of all sin*. [Ecclus 10.15]

Pride watches over the court of the heart, lest any of its enemies climb up against it and disturb its peace- of which the Lord says, in Luke:

*If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace*. [Lk 19.42]

and the prophet:

*I had a zeal on occasion of the wicked, seeing the peace of sinners*. [Ps 72.3]

There follows: *But, if a stronger than he cometh and overcometh him*, etc. The ‘stronger’ is humility, of whose strength David said to Saul, in the first book of Kings:

*I thy servant have killed both a lion and a bear*. [1Kg(Sm) 17.36]

David means ‘strong-armed’, and he represents the humble man who, the more he is humbled, becomes stronger. The humble man is like a worm, that earth-eater that contracts itself so as to extend itself the more. In the same way, the humble man contracts and belittles himself, that he may more strongly stretch out and reach heavenly good things. Ecclesiasticus says,

*He hath lifted him up from his low estate, and hath exalted his head from tribulation,*

*and many have wondered at him*. [Ecclus 11.13]

The humble, yet strong, David says, "I thy servant". O shining pearl! O sweet-smelling blossom! O humility, spicy as cinnamon! *I thy servant!* The humble man looks on himself as a servant, and calls himself a servant. He casts himself at the feet of all, abases himself, and thinks himself less than he is. So St Gregory[5] says: "It is characteristic of the elect, that they think themselves to be less than they are."

This humble servant slays the lion of pride and the bear of lust. And note: he says that he first killed the lion, and then the bear, because no-one can mortify lust in himself unless he first toils to expel the spirit of pride from the court of his heart. So it is said, if a stronger than he come upon him and overcometh him, he will take away all the armour wherein he trusted. The armour (St Matthew calls them ‘vessels’ [cf. 12.29]) of the spirit of pride is the five bodily senses, with which, as with arms, he attacks others; and in which, as in so many vessels, he carries the deadly poison of pride and offers it to others. But the humility of Jesus Christ (who is God, blessed above all [cf. Rom 9.5]) comes, and he says:

*Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart*. [Mt 11.29]

and he enters the house of the strong man, the court of the heart, in which pride dwells, and overcomes him and drives him out. The medicine of humility expels the poison of pride, and when it is driven out, all its armour, in which it trusted, humility takes away; so that from then on nothing conceited, nothing exalted, nothing vicious may appear in the bodily senses. Instead, the insignia of humility are displayed everywhere.

**(A sermon for religious, and how they should change their former life*: In that day, there shall be five cities*.)**

16. *This is the change of the right hand of the Most High* [Ps 76.11], of which Isaiah says:

*In that day, there shall be five cities in the land of Egypt, speaking the language of Canaan...*

*One shall be called the city of the sun*. [Is 19.18]

Egypt means 'darkness', or 'sorrow'; it represents the human body, which is a land of darkness and sorrow. Darkness, because it is obscured with the gloom of ignorance and malice; sorrow, because it is full of grief and sadness. In this land of Egypt there are five cities, the five bodily senses. Of these five, one is called the city of the sun. The eyes are the city of the sun, because just as the sun enlightens the whole world, so are the eyes the light of the body [cf. Mt 6.22].

'In that day', when the stronger humility comes and enters the heart of man and overcomes the spirit of pride, and drives out the blindness of the mind, the five cities in the land of Egypt, which previously spoke the Egyptian language, concupiscence of the flesh, will speak the language of Canaan ('exchange'), because they are changed from vices to virtues, from pride to humility. Then humility and simplicity will appear in the eyes; truth and kindness will sound in the mouth; all detraction and flattery will be removed from the ears; purity and piety will be in the hands, and maturity will be found in the feet.

Let us pray then, dear brothers, to Jesus Christ, who overcame the pride of the devil by his humility, that he will grant us to destroy the horns of pride and conceit with humility of heart, and display everywhere in our body the tokens of humility; that we may be found worthy to attain his glory. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

**(On the fourth clause.**

**First, a sermon on interior solitude and the sweetness of contemplation: *Like a garden of pleasure*.)**

17. *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through the places without water, seeking rest; and not finding, he saith: I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he is come, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and entering in they dwell there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first*. [Lk 11.24-26]

The prophet Joel says:

*The land is like a garden of pleasure before him, and behind him a desolate wilderness*. [Joel 2.3]

This land (or 'ground', from the verb 'to grind') is the mind of man, contrite for sins. While it is 'before him' (God), it is like a garden of pleasure. What greater pleasure or joy can there be for the human mind, than to be 'before him' with whom, and in whom, is all that is true; and without whom everything that seems to be is nothing, and all abundance is only a lack? The mind of man is 'before him', when it reckons that it has nothing good from itself, in itself, or by itself; but attributes everything to him who is all good and the supreme good, from whom as from a centre all graces radiate in a straight line to the circumference. This land, as long as it is before him, is truly a garden of delight, in which grow "the rose of charity, the violet of humility and the lily of chastity". Of this garden, the Bride says in the Canticles:

*My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the bed of aromatical spices*. [Cant 6.1]

The garden of the Beloved is the mind of the penitent, in which is 'the bed of aromatical spices.' It is a small bed, signifying humility, the seed-bed of those spices, the virtues. Into this garden he goes down, in this little bed the Beloved takes his rest. So he himself says in Isaiah:

*To whom shall I have respect, but to him that is poor and little and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my words?* [Is 66.2]

Indeed, *the earth is like a garden of pleasure before him*.

But it continues, *and behind him a desolate wilderness*. When the human mind stands before the face of God, contemplating his blessedness and tasting his sweetness, then it is truly a garden of delight. But when unhappy man will not stand before him, but 'behind him', wanting only to look at what is 'after' him, then the garden of delight becomes a desolate wilderness. The things 'after' God are those temporal things which God referred to when he said to Moses:

*Thou shalt see my back parts: but my face thou canst not see*. [Ex 33.23]

Man sees the 'back' of God and not his 'face' when he delights in those transitory and

temporal things. So, again, Agar says:

*I have seen the hinder parts of him that seeth me*. [Gen 16.15]

Agar means 'holding a feast', and that feast denotes the pleasure of carnal things, glorying in banquets and drunkenness as in a feast. She sees 'the hinder parts of the Lord', because she takes delight in the visible things that she sees carnally. St Gregory[6] says: "The good mind cannot think of carnal things, unless it sees them carnally. Thus, *after him a desolate wilderness*.

By 'desolate', there is meant the sterility of the mind; by 'wilderness', the malice of the devil. The devil makes a desert of the mind he dwells in, sterile of good works. The text of Joel is here **concordant** with the Holy Gospel. When Joel says, *the earth is like a garden of pleasure before him*, he is **concordant** with the first clause of the Gospel, *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man*. When he adds, *and behind him a desolate wilderness*, he is **concordant** with the final clause, *Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself*. Let us say, then: *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man*.

There are four things to note in this Gospel: the going out of the devil; his temptation of the just; the lukewarm behaviour of the negligent soul; the return of the unclean spirit with seven other spirits. These begin, firstly: *When the unclean spirit*; secondly: *He walketh through the places without water*; thirdly: *When he is come, he findeth it swept and garnished*; fourthly: *Then he goeth and taketh seven other spirits*.

**(A sermon on the devil's resting-place: *He sleepeth under the shadows*.)**

18. Let us say, then: *When the unclean spirit*. The devil is called an unclean' spirit. St Gregory[7] tells us that "Spirit is the name of a nature which God created clean, pure and good; but by the uncleanness of its pride it became unclean, and fell from the cleanness of heavenly glory." Like a dirty pig, he chooses to make his dwelling in the uncleanness of sinners, and there he takes his rest. So Job says of him:

*He sleepeth under the shadow, in the covert of the reed, and in moist places*. [Job 40.16]

Here are three vices. The 'shadow', cold and dark, denotes pride which takes away the warmth of divine love and the brightness of true light. The 'reed', or cane, is blown about by the wind; beautiful outside but hollow inside, and with fruit like wool. It denotes the avaricious man, agitated by the wind of cupidity. He glories in outward things, but lacks grace within. His riches, which he gathers together to his own ill, are scattered like wool by the whirlwind of death. The 'moist places' denote the lustful, who wallow in the swamp of lust and greed. See what a guest-house that pig sleeps in, that unclean spirit rests in, *when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man*. The unclean spirit goes out of a man, when he recognizes the uncleanness of his iniquity.

The second book of Chronicles says:

*The captains and army of the king of the Assyrians took Manasses, and carried him bound with chains and fetters to Babylon. And after that he was in distress he prayed to the Lord his God: and did penance exceedingly before the God of his fathers. And he entreated him, and besought him earnestly. And he heard his prayer, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. And Manasses knew that the Lord was God*. [2Chr 33.11-13]

Manasses means ‘forgotten’, and denotes the sinner who forgets God and his precepts in time of prosperity. So in Genesis we read:

*The chief butler, when things prospered with him, forgot his interpreter*.[Gen 40.23]

Our interpreter is Jesus Christ, who interprets eternal life to us. We forget him when we are carried away by transitory prosperity. Temporal things make God fall into oblivion; so Manasses, the sinner forgetful of God, is taken by the Assyrians (‘those who direct’, the demons who direct the arrow of temptation from the bow of malice, to kill his soul) in the consent of his mind, and is bound by the chains of evil deeds and the fetters of evil custom; and so he is led away to Babylon, the confusion of a blinded mind. But because the mercy of God is greater than the malice of any sinner, the sinner must do what Manasses did: He prayed to the Lord his God: and did penance exceedingly; and he entreated him, and besought him earnestly. With these, the sinner should oppose the four things aforesaid. He should pray to the Lord to free him from the hand of the devil. He should do penance, to loose the chains of evil deeds. He should entreat God to break the fetters of bad habits; and he should beseech him earnestly to rescue him from the confusion of a blinded mind. Then God the merciful, whose mercies are without number. will do according to what follows: He heard his prayer, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. And Manasses knew that the Lord was God. God hears the prayer of a humbled and contrite sinner, and brings him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. What else is Jerusalem but the outpouring of grace, the forgiveness of sins, the reconciliation of God and the sinner? That is the Vision of Peace, where he reigns who goes, as Ecclesiasticus says *from prison and chains to a kingdom* [cf. Ecclus 4.14]. This is how he knows that the Lord is God, who freed him, who made the unclean spirit go out of him, as said: *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man*.

**(A sermon for penitents or religious: *In a desert land*, and on the nature of bees.)**

19. There follows, secondly, *He walketh through the places without water, seeking rest*. The devil’s walking is just his temptation; as he answers in Job:

*I have gone round about the earth, and walked through it*. [Job 1.7]

The devil first goes round about the earth (the mind of man), craftily finding out to which vice he is most susceptible. Then he walks through it, tempting each one according to

what he has discovered. He walketh through the places without water. These waterless places (Matthew calls them 'dry' [cf. Mt 12.43]) are the saints, in whom the moisture of greed and lust is all dried up. One of them says in a Psalm:

*In a desert land, and where there is no way and no water:*

*so in the sanctuary have I come before thee,*

*to see thy power and thy glory*. [Ps 62.3]

There are three virtues here, which sanctify and enlighten the mind to contemplate God. The 'desert land' is poverty; 'no way' denotes chastity; and 'no water' denotes abstinence. The land is the body or mind of a just man, which is like a garden of pleasure before God. He says,

*O God, my God: in a land* (my body or mind)

*which is desert* (by poverty),

*pathless* (by chastity: being without that path of which Solomon says*, A harlot is as dung in the way* [Ecclus 9.10], and Isaiah: *Thou hast laid thy body as the ground and as a way to them that went over* [Is 51.23]),

*and waterless* (parched by abstinence from food and drink):

*so in the sanctuary* (a holy way of life)

*I appeared before you* (so that you who sit upon the Cherubim might appear to me).

Then he adds:

*that I might see* (be able to contemplate)

*your power and glory* (Jesus Christ your Son).

The Apostle calls Christ *the power and wisdom of God* [cf. 1Cor 1.24]; and Solomon says: *A wise son is the glory of his father* [cf. Prov 13.1]. This is the way we contemplate the power and glory of God. Whoever does not walk by this way is blind, like one who gropes along feeling the wall with his hand.

*So he walketh through waterless places*. The devil tempts holy and just folk, and, as Job says,

*He trusteth that the Jordan may run into his mouth*. [Job 40.18]

The Jordan (meaning ‘humble descent’, or ‘valley of judgement’) stands for holy people who, if they offend in any way, are immediately humbled and go down to judge themselves in the valley of compunction and confession. The devil, walking through these waterless places, hopes that they may run into his mouth. he seeks his rest there, but they (as Job says) are ready to raise Leviathan [Job 3.8]. They ‘raise Leviathan’ when they do not let the devil find rest in the guest house of their hearts by the consent of their mind.

The saints should do as the bees do. It is said that they sit on guard at the entrance to the hive, and if any stranger dare to enter by those gates, they will not allow him to remain among them. They chase him immediately, until they drive him out of the hive. Bees are also said to be born without feet, or to bind up their feet (so that in Latin they are called *a-pes*, without foot). In this they resemble the just, who should bind up their ‘feet’, the affections of charity which they are not born with (for *we are all born children of wrath* [Eph 2.3]) but are given by grace alone. Their "hives" are their bodies, the doors of which are the five senses and, spiritually, the eyes. They should keep a careful watch over these, lest anything foreign, anything of the devil, should enter in. If by chance any devilish suggestion or carnal pleasure should enter by those doors, then they should in no wise let it remain inside, because delay brings danger. Someone[8] has said: "A thought allowed to linger is a mortal sin. When reason discerns that a thought is tending towards something unlawful, and yet does not restrain it as much as it is able, that is a thought allowed to linger." Bees should immediately rise up and chase it with the stings of contrition and prayer, and drive it out from their bodies’ hive. Thus they are ready to raise Leviathan so that he cannot find rest in them.

**(A sermon on the triple broom and its meaning: *I will return unto my house*.)**

20. There follows, thirdly, *Not finding, he saith: I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he is come, he findeth it swept and garnished*. Matthew says, he findeth it empty, swept and garnished. Note that: "There is a three-fold sweeping: contrition, confession and satisfaction."[9] About the sweeping of contrition, the prophet says:

*I swept my spirit*. [Ps 76.7]

He ‘sweeps his spirit’ when, with the broom of contrition, he cleans the dirt of unclean thoughts and the dust of worldly vanity from the surface of his soul. About the sweepings of confession and satisfaction, the Lord says in Isaiah:

*I will sweep it and wear it out with a besom, saith the Lord of hosts*. [Is 14.23]

The Lord ‘sweeps’ Babylon when, by confession, he cleans from sin the soul that has been confused by sin. He *wears it out with a besom* when he strikes it with the scourges

of satisfaction. So with these three brooms the house of man's soul is cleansed. The Lord says of this cleansing in Isaiah:

*Wash yourselves, be clean.*

*Take away the evil of your devices from my eyes* (the broom of contrition).

*Cease to do perversely* (cleansed by the broom of confession);

*learn to do well* (chastened by the broom of satisfaction). [Is 1.16-17]

**(A sermon against the lukewarm: *The Amalekites had made an invasion*.)**

But because it often happens that good deeds are followed by complacency and idleness, we read, *He found it empty and garnished*. Blessed Bernard[10] says, "Idleness is at the bottom of all temptations, of all evil and useless thoughts." So, in I Kings, we are told that:

*The Amalekites had made an invasion on the south side upon Siceleg, and had smitten Siceleg, and burnt it with fire. And had taken the women captives that were in it, both little and great*. [1Kg(Sm) 30.1-2]

The Amalekites (their name means 'blood-lickers') stand for the devils, who desire to lick up and devour the blood of souls, their compunction to tears. They 'invade Siceleg from the south', from the warm wind of which Job says:

*Consider the paths of Theman, the ways of Saba*. [Job 6.19]

Theman is 'the warm south', meaning a lax and idle way of life by which the devil tempts. When the unclean spirit finds a house abandoned and empty by idleness, he enters in. Because David remained in Jerusalem and did not go forth to war, as the second book of Kings tells us [2Kg(Sm) 11.1], his idleness and slackness were punished by vice. Saba, 'a net' or 'a captive', means the binding by sin which often joins lukewarmness and idleness. A person who does not go by strict judgement, but by loose and careless steps, and is involved in lax behaviour, is hindered from the things that belong to God. Siceleg, the 'drawing of a cleansed voice', is that soul which should speak out clearly about its sins, and not be mealy-mouthed. From the south, the lukewarmness and idleness of its life, it is capture by evil spirits, and burnt with the fire of wickedness, and whatever there is of virtue in it, whether small or great, is taken prisoner. Thus, *he finds it empty and garnished*.

**(A sermon for penitents, and on the nature of bees: *He found it empty and garnished*; and: *I am black but beautiful*.)**

21. Natural History tells us that the small bees are the ones that do the most work. They have delicate wings, and their colour is black and, as it were, burnt. The fancy bees are the kind that do nothing. The small bees are penitents, who are small in their own eyes. They work hard, and are always busy with something, lest the devil find their house empty and idle. They have 'delicate wings', contempt of the world and love of the heavenly kingdom, with which they lift themselves up from the world and balance themselves in the air, keenly contemplating the glory of God. They are also black in colour, as though burnt.

In Canticles, the penitent soul says:

*I am black but beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem,*

*as the tents of Cedar, as the curtains of Solomon.*

*Do not consider me that I am brown,*

*because the sun hath altered my colour*. [Cant 1.4-5]

O daughters of Jerusalem, you angelic powers and faithful souls, I am black with sackcloth and ashes, with outward fasts and vigils, but beautiful in purity of mind and integrity of faith within. I am black like the tents of Cedar (sorrow), I live in tents which are moved from place to place, and from which soldiers fight and are fought against. Here I have no abiding city, but I look for one that is to come [cf Heb 13.14], and while I fight I am assailed. In all this there is nothing for me but sorrow and pain. but I am beautiful like the curtains of Solomon, which were blue and red. The blue curtains stand for purity of mind and contemplation of heavenly glory; the red ones are integrity of faith and the harshness of martyrdom or of affliction. Do not consider me that I am brown, because the sun has altered my colour. When the sun is eclipsed or fails, it takes away the colour of everything. In this way the true Sun, Jesus Christ, *who knoweth his going down* [cf. Ps 103.19], when he suffered the eclipse of death upon the Cross, took colour from everything- all vanities, all false glories and all honours.

So the penitent soul says, *I am black, I am brown, because the sun has changed my colour*. When with the eyes of faith I see my God, my Spouse, my Jesus, hanging on the Cross, pierced with the nails, given gall and vinegar to drink, and crowned with a crown of thorns- then every beauty, every glory, every honour and passing pomp turns pale, and is reckoned by me as nothing. Such are the little bees, black and burnt. The fancy bees, however, are lukewarm and foolish religious, who glory in the ornateness of their dress, who display their lives like phylacteries, and broaden the fringes of their holiness. Their house is splendid outside, but inside it is full of corruption and dead men's bones. This leads to what follows: *Then he goes and takes seven other spirits*.

22. Fourthly, then, these seven spirits are the seven cows referred to in the story of Joseph in Genesis,

*ill favoured and lean fleshed, and they devoured the other seven whose bodies were sleek and well-conditioned*. [cf. Gen 41.1-4]

They are also the seven ears of corn,

*thin and blasted, that devoured the fulness and beauty of the other seven*. [ibid, vv 5-7]

They are also the seven years of exceeding sterility, so great that it consumed all the abundance of the other seven years. The seven fine fat cows, the seven full and well-formed cows, and the seven years of great fertility, all stand for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, of which Isaiah says:

*The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him:*

*the spirit of wisdom and understanding;*

*the spirit of counsel and fortitude;*

*the spirit of knowledge and of godliness;*

*and he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord*. [Is 11.2-3]

These gifts are called 'fine fat cows', because of the beauty of a good life and the fecundity of virtue which they bestow on those on whom they rest. They are called full and well-formed ears of corn, from the faith of Jesus Christ, the grain of wheat, full and mature with the twin love of God and of neighbour.

The seven gifts of the Spirit are also called seven years of great fertility, because in the seventy years of our pilgrimage they make the mind, on which they rest with the gift of sevenfold grace, to abound with the abundance of great fertility. But alas, alas! The seven lean and ill-favoured kine, the seven thin and blasted ears, the seven years of exceeding sterility, and the seven spirits more wicked than the unclean spirit enter the empty and garnished house, and eat up the seven gifts of the Spirit. So the last state of that man is worse than the first. They are called 'more wicked' from their effect: they make a man more wicked than before. These seven wickeder spirits are called lean and ill-favoured cows, because of the deformation of the image and likeness of God, and the failure of charity which is the fatness of the soul. They are called thin and blasted ears, which because of the stench of their crimes smell scorched. They are called years of exceeding sterility because of the sterility of good deeds, which brings evil upon this wretched mind when they occupy it. So the last state of that man is worse than the first.

We pray you then, Lord Jesus, that by the power of your virtue the unclean spirit may go out from the hearts of the faithful. Make those hearts dry and waterless places, and

make their clean conscience fervent in your holy service; and fill them with the spirit of sevenfold grace. May he grant us this, to whom is honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

**(On the fifth clause.**

**A sermon on the blessedness of blessed Mary, and her virginity: *Blessed is the womb*; and: *Thy belly is like a heap of wheat*.)**

1. At that time, *A certain woman from the crowd, lifting up her voice, said to him: Blessed is the womb that bore thee and the paps that gave thee suck*, etc. [Lk 11.27]

The Bridegroom says to the Bride in Canticles:

*Let thy voice sound in my ears; for thy voice is sweet*. [Cant 2.14]

The ‘sweet voice’ is the praise of the glorious Virgin, which most sweetly sounds in the ears of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ the Son of that Virgin. Let each and every one of us lift up our voice to the praise of blessed Mary, and say to her Son: *Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the paps that gave thee suck*.

2. To be ‘blessed’ is to be fulfilled. "Blessed is he who has all he wants, and wants nothing evil." "Blessed is he to whom comes all he desires." Blessed then is the womb of the glorious Virgin, who for nine months was worthy to bear all good, the supreme good, the blessedness of the angels and the reconciliation of sinners. As St Augustine[11] says, "We were reconciled by the Son alone, as regards human nature; but not by the Son alone as regards the divine nature. The whole Trinity reconciled us to Itself, because it was the Trinity Itself that made the Word alone to take human nature." Blessed then is the womb of the glorious Virgin, of whom St Augustine[12] says in his book "On Nature and Grace": "I make an exception of the Virgin Mary. When discussing sin, I do not wish (for the Lord’s own honour) to raise any question whatsoever about her. Greater grace was given her, to overcome every kind of sin, than simply to conceive and bear him who, as all agree, had no sin. Except for this Virgin, if all holy men and women could be gathered together and asked whether they had sin, what reply could they make other than that of John: *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us* [1Jn 1.8]. But that glorious Virgin was prevented by a singular grace, and filled with it, that she might have as the fruit of her womb him whom from the beginning she acknowledged as Lord of the whole universe."

3. Blessed, then, is that womb of which, in praise of his Mother, the Son says in Canticles:

*Thy belly is like a heap of wheat, set about with lilies*. [Cant 8.2]

The womb of the glorious Virgin is likened to 'a heap of wheat'; a 'heap', because in it were gathered up all the privileges of merit and reward; 'of wheat', because in it, as in a barn, there was stored by the industry of the true Joseph the wheat to prevent all Egypt from dying of hunger. Only the purest wheat is stored in the barn, so that its grain may be milled and ground. White on the inside, ruddy on the outside, it represents Jesus Christ who was hidden for nine months in the store-room of the blessed Virgin, to be ground for us in the mill of the Cross; white by innocence of life and red by the shedding of his blood. This blessed womb was 'set about with lilies'. Lilies, the colour of milk, represent the shining white virginity of the blessed Virgin Mary. Her womb was 'set about', fortified with humility as with a wall, 'with lilies' of inward and outward virginity. As St Augustine[13] says: "The only begotten God, when he was conceived, took true flesh from the Virgin; and when he was born he preserved the integrity of virginity in his Mother." Blessed, then, is the womb that bore thee!

Truly blessed, which bore Thee, God and Son of God, Lord of angels, Creator of heaven and earth, Redeemer of the world! The daughter bore the father! The poor little Virgin bore the Son! O cherubim, seraphim, angels and archangels! Avert your gaze, bow your heads and reverently adore the temple of the Son of God, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, the blessed womb set about with lilies! Say: Blessed is the womb that bore thee! O earthly sons of Adam, to whom is granted this grace and special privilege, that with contrite hearts and prostrate on the ground you may worship the ivory throne of the true Solomon, high and lifted up as the throne seen by Isaiah, say: *Blessed is the womb that bore thee!* [cf 3(1)Kg 10.18-20; Cant 3.9-10; Is 6.1]

**(A sermon on the Nativity of her Son: *The dearest hind*, and on the properties of the hind and the palm.)**

4. There follows: *And the paps that gave thee suck*. Of these, Solomon says in Proverbs:

*Thy dearest hind and most agreeable fawn:*

*let her breasts inebriate thee at all times;*

*be thou delighted continually with her love.* [Prov 5.19]

Natural History tells us that the hind gives birth beside the trodden way, knowing that because of man the wolf avoids that trodden way. The 'dearest hind' is blessed Mary, who gave birth in the wayside inn to her Son, 'the most gracious fawn', because he was given to us freely and in a time of grace. So Luke says:

*And she brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes*

(that we might receive the robe of immortality),

*and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn*. [Lk 2.7]

The Gloss tells us that " There was no room in the inn, so that we might have many mansions in heaven." The breasts of that hind, most dear to all the world, should ‘inebriate’ thee, O christian, ‘at all times’. Forgetful of temporal things, like one inebriated, you should *reach out to the things that lie ahead* [cf. Phil 3.13]. Yet it is remarkable indeed that the text says ‘inebriate’, for breasts do not contain wine that inebriates, but milk that nourishes. Listen to the reason: her Son, praising her in the Canticles, says:

*How beautiful art thou, and how comely, my dearest, in delights!*

*Thy stature is like to a palm tree and thy breasts to clusters of grapes.* [Cant 8.6-7]

How beautiful you are in mind, and how comely in body, my Mother, my Bride, dearest hind: ‘in delights’, that is, in the rewards of eternal life.

**(A sermon for any feast of the same Virgin: *I saw before me a vine*.)**

5. *Thy stature is like to a palm tree*. The lower part of a palm tree has a rough bark. Above, it is beautiful in appearance and in fruit; and, as Isidore[14] says, it produces fruit a hundredfold. Likewise blessed Mary wore, in this world below, the rough bark of poverty; but in heaven she is beautiful and glorious, because she is Queen of Angels. She was worthy to bear the fruits of virginity a hundredfold, being Virgin of virgins, and above all virgins. Yes, *thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes.*

The grape-cluster is, as it were, many fruits in one, produced by the vine. In the story of Joseph in Genesis, the king’s chief butler says:

*I saw before me a vine, on which there were three branches, which little by little sent out buds, and after the blossoms brought forth ripe grapes*. [Gen 40.9-10]

There are seven noteworthy things here: the vine, the three branches, the buds, the flowers, the grapes. Let us see how all seven are most appropriate to blessed Mary.

The vine is a quick-rooting plant that entwines about itself. This is blessed Mary, who was more swiftly and deeply rooted than all others in the love of God; and who entwines herself inseparably to her Son, the true Vine who said: *I am the true Vine* [Jn 15.1]; and who says of herself in Ecclesiasticus:

*As a vine I have brought forth a pleasant odour*. [Ecclus 24.23]

The child-bearing of the blessed Virgin has no parallel in the female sex, but it does have a likeness in the natural order. How did the Virgin bring forth the Saviour? As the vine-flower sends forth its scent. Just as you see the blossom to be unspoilt when it gives out

its scent, so you must believe concerning the Virgin’s modesty when she brought forth the Saviour. What else is the flower of virginity but a sweet perfume?

The three branches of the vine were: the angelic salutation, the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, and the ineffable conception of the Son of God. From these three branches there is brought forth and multiplied daily throughout the world a progeny of faithful souls. the buds of the vine are the humility and virginity of blessed Mary. The flowers are fruitfulness without stain and childbirth without pain. The three clusters of grapes on the vine are the poverty, patience and abstinence of the blessed Virgin. These are ripe grapes, from which there flows a full-bodied and sweet-scented wine, that inebriates (and yet in so doing makes sober!) the minds of the faithful. The text fits, then*: Let her breasts inebriate thee at all times, and be delighted continually with her love*; for it is by love of her that you may despise the false delights of the world, and tread down the concupiscence of the flesh.

6. Flee to her, O sinner, for she is a city of refuge. Just as once the Lord set apart cities of refuge, to which might flee anyone guilty of involuntary homicide [cf Num 35.11,14], so now by the Lord’s mercy he gives the name of Mary as a refuge of mercy even for voluntary homicide. The name of our Lady is a strong tower. The sinner who flees to her will be safe. It is a sweet name, a name to comfort sinners, a name of blessed hope. Lady, your name is ‘the desire of the soul’ [cf. Is 26.8].

*And the name of the Virgin was Mary*. [Lk 1.27]

*Thy name is as oil poured out*. [Cant 1.2]

"The name of Mary is joyful in the heart, honey in the mouth, a melody in the ear." to the great praise of Mary, then, is said: *Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the paps that gave thee suck*.

By sucking we take nourishment. When Christ took milk, he worked our salvation. Our salvation was his Passion. He underwent his Passion in that body which had been nourished by the Virgin’s milk. So Canticles says:

*I have drunk my wine with my milk*. [Cant 5.1]

Lord Jesus, why did you not say, "I have drunk vinegar with my milk"? He who had been suckled by virgin breasts was given gall and vinegar to drink. The sweetness of milk was turned to the bitterness of gall, so that this bitterness might proffer us the drink of eternal sweetness. He sucked the breast, who willed on Calvary to be pierced in the breast by the lance, so that his little ones might suck blood like milk. As Job says:

*The young eagles suck blood*. [Job 39.30]

7. There follows: *But he said: Shall we not rather say* ... The Gloss explains that Mary should be praised not just because she bore the Word of God in her womb, but still more because she kept the commandments of God in her action.

We pray you then, our Lady, star of the sea, that you shine upon us when we are buffetted by the raging of the sea. Guide us to harbour, defend our going out with your watchful presence. So may we be found fit to go out safely from this prison, and come joyfully to unending joy. May he grant this, whom you bore in your blessed womb and suckled with your most holy breasts. To him be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] cf. BERNARD, *In cantica sermo* 59,3; PL 183.1063

[2] JUVENAL, *Satires*, 2,47

[3] LUCIAN, *De bello civili* 192-193

[4] BERNARD, *Tractatus de gradibus humilitate et superbia* 18,47; PL 182.967

[5] GREGORY, *Moralium* XXXIV,22,43; PL 76.742

[6] cf. GREGORY, *Moralium* XX,15,38; PL 76.159

[7] or rather: AUGUSTINE, *Contra Iulianum* VI,20,63; PL 44.861

[8] cf. RICHARD OF ST VICTOR, *Explanatio in Cantica Canticorum*, 25; PL 196.480

[9] cf. INNOCENT III, *sermo* 15; PL 217.383

[10] BERNARD (=GUIGO), *Epistola ad fratres*, I,8,21; PL 184.321

[11] P. LOMBARD, *Sent. III, dist*. 1,3; quoting FULGENTIUS, *De fide ad Petrum* 2,23 PL40.760

[12] cf. AUGUSTINE, *De natura et gratia* 36,42; PL 44.267

[13] FULGENTIUS, *op.cit*. 2,17; PL 40.758

[14] Not in ISIDORE; possibly A. NECKAM, *De laudibus divinae sapientiae*, dist. VIII,37-38

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

**(The Gospel for the fourth Sunday of Lent: "Of the five loaves".)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for the preacher: *Cast thy bread*.)**

1. "The Lord fed five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes."

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon tells preachers:

*Cast thy bread upon the running waters:*

*for after a long time thou shalt find it again*. [Eccles 11.1]

"The running waters are the people running towards death," and so the woman of Tekoa says:

*Like waters we all fall down*, [2Kg(Sm) 14.14]

and Isaiah says:

*This people hath cast away the waters of Siloe, that go with silence,*

*and hath rather taken Rasin and* (Phacee) *the son of Romelia*. [Is 8.7]

Siloe means ‘sent’; so the waters of Siloe represent the teachings of Jesus Christ, who was sent by the Father. Those who pursue earthly desires cast away this water, and instead take ‘Rasin’, the spirit of pride, and ‘Phacee’, the defilement of lust; and so they fall like water into the depths of hell. Cast thy bread upon the waters, then, O preacher: the bread of preaching of which is said*, Not in bread alone* .. [Mt 4.4]; and by Isaiah, *Bread is given to the just* [Is 33.16]; and *after a long time* (in the day of judgement) *thou shalt find it* (the reward for it). In the name of the Lord, I will cast bread upon the waters, and for love of you compose a brief sermon on the five loaves and two fishes.

**(A sermon for rebuking sin: *Judah, by the Odollamite*. The five-fold bread and its meaning.)**

2. We will speak, then, "of the five loaves, etc." The five loaves represent the five books of Moses, in which we find five refreshments for the soul. The first loaf is the rebuking of sin by contrition; the second is the laying bare of sin in confession; the third is its abasement and humiliation in satisfaction; the fourth is zeal for souls in preaching; the fifth is the sweetness of our heavenly home in contemplation.

Concerning the first loaf, we read in the first book, Genesis, that Judah sent a kid by the Odollamite to Thamar [cf. Gen 38.20]. Judah means ‘confessing’, and stands for the penitent. He should send ‘a kid’, the reproaching of sin, to Thamar, meaning ‘bitter’, ‘exchanged’ or ‘a palm’. She too denotes the penitent soul, and the three meanings denote the three states of penitents. ‘Bitter’ is the state of beginners, ‘exchanged’ that of proficients, and ‘palm’ that of the perfect. The Odollamite (meaning ‘testimony in water’) represents the tears of sorrow with which the penitent bears witness that he reproaches himself for sin, and will not commit it again. So from this Thamar, Judah may beget Phares and Zara, as Matthew tells us [cf. Mt 1.3]. Phares means ‘division’, and Zara ‘rising’. The penitent must first separate himself from sin, and then seek the illumination of good works. In the words of the psalmist,

*Decline from evil* (Phares) *and do good* (Zara). [Ps 34.27]

Concerning the second loaf, we are told in the second book of Moses, Exodus, that Moses struck the Egyptian, and hid his body in the sand [Ex 2.12]. Moses is ‘from the waters’, and he represents the penitent, awash with the waters of sorrow. He must strike the Egyptian, mortal sin, in contrition, and bury him under the sand in confession. St Augustine[1] says: "If you uncover, God will cover; if you hide, God will find out." He who discloses his sins ‘hides the Egyptian’- hides it from God, I say, even as he reveals it to the priest. In Genesis, it says that Rachel hid the idols of Laban [cf. Gen 31.34]. Rachel (‘a sheep’) is the penitent soul who should hide the idols (mortal sins) that belong to Laban (the devil). *Blessed are those whose sins are covered* [Ps 31.23].

Concerning the third loaf, we find in the third book of Moses, Leviticus, that the priests are commanded to *cast the crop of the throat, and the feathers, beside the altar at the east side in the place of ashes* [Lev 1.16]. The ‘crop of the throat’ denotes the burning thirst of avarice, of which Job says:

*Thirst shall burn against him* (the avaricious man). [Job 18.9]

The ‘feathers’ denote the vanity of pride:

*The wing of the ostrich* (the hypocrite)

*is like the wings of the heron and the hawk* (the contemplative man). [Job 39.13]

These are cast 'in the place of ashes' when with heartfelt pangs we remember that first curse: *Ashes thou art and to ashes thou shalt return* [cf. Gen 3.19]. The south [*sic*] side is eternal life, from which in our first parents we have fallen. The penitent is humbled in satisfaction, as he casts the crop of avarice and the feathers of pride from himself, recalling the utterance of the first curse and groaning every day that he is cast out of God's presence and sight.

Concerning the fourth loaf, we are told in the fourth book, Numbers, how Phinees took a dagger and stabbed two fornicators through the genital parts [cf. Num 25.7-8]. Phinees is the preacher, who should take the dagger of the word of preaching, and stab fornicators through the genital parts, so that with their disgrace laid bare and brought into the open they may be ashamed of the evil they have done. The Lord says by the prophet:

*I will discover thy shame to thy face*; [Nahum 3.5]

and:

*Fill their faces with shame,* etc. [Ps 82.17]

Concerning the fifth loaf, we read in the fifth book, Deuteronomy, that Moses went up from the plains of Moab upon Mount Abarim, and there died before the Lord [cf. Dt 36.1,5]. Moses, the penitent, should go up from the plains of Moab ('from the father', meaning the conversation of carnal folk, that comes from their father, the devil), to Mount Abarim ('going over'), the excellence of contemplation, so that he *may pass from this world to the Father* [cf. Jn 13.1]. These are the five loaves of which it is said, "He fed them with five loaves and two fishes."

**(A sermon on the five cubits of myrrh: "Of the five loaves", and the five brothers of Judah, and their meaning.)**

3. These are also the five cubits of myrrh, of which Solinus[2] writes: "In Arabia there is a tree called 'myrrh', five cubits high above the earth." Arabia means 'sacred', and it stands for Holy Church, in which grows the myrrh of penitence which raises man five cubits above the earth, like the five Gospel loaves. They are also the five brothers of Judah, of whom Jacob says in Genesis:

*Judah, thee shall thy brothers praise*. [Gen 49.8]

They are Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar and Zebulon; whose names mean, respectively, 'seeing', 'hearing', 'added to', 'reward', and 'dwelling of fortitude'.

Judah needs his brother Reuben, to see in contrition the seven eyes, of which Zechariah says:

*Upon one stone there were set seven eyes*. [Zech 3.9]

The penitent is 'a stone' by his constancy, and 'one' by the unity of his faith. The first eye is to see what is past, so as to weep; the second is to see what is to come, so as to beware; the third is to see prosperity, lest it lift him up; the fourth is to see adversity, lest it cast him down; the fifth is to see things above, that he may savour them; the sixth is to see things below, that he may reject them; and the seventh is to see inward things, so that they may please him in God.

He needs the second brother, Simeon, in confession, so that the Lord may hear his voice; as Moses says in Deuteronomy,

*Lord, hear the voice of Judah*; [Dt 33.7]

and of which Canticles says:

*Thy voice sounded in my ears; thy voice is sweet*. [Cant 2.16]

To these two, contrition and confession, there must be added the third brother, Levi, satisfaction; so that the measure of punishment may be proportionate to the offence: *Bring forth fruits worthy of penance* [Lk 3.8]. The Law was given on Sinai ('measure'), and the Law of grace is given to him whose penitence is proportionate to his guilt.

He needs his fourth brother, Issachar, so that being on fire with zeal for souls he may receive the reward of eternal blessedness. The useless trunk that cumbers the ground, the empty fool who simply takes up space in the Church, will not receive the reward of eternal life, but the sharpness of eternal death.

Finally, I pray that he will have his fifth brother, Zebulon, so that he may dwell with simple Jacob [cf. Gen 25.27] in the tents of contemplation; and so will merit to receive a taste of heavenly sweetness. These, then, are the five loaves of which it is said, "He fed them with five loaves and two fishes."

**(A sermon on the four cursed things, and on the five assemblies and their meaning: *By three things the earth is disturbed*.)**

4. The two fishes are understanding and remembrance, with which the five books of Moses should be seasoned. What you understand of the Law, you should also keep in the storehouse of your memory. Alternatively, the two fish which were brought from the depths of the sea to the King's table are Moses and Peter. Moses was taken from the waters, and Peter was promoted from fisherman to Apostle. The Synagogue was entrusted to Moses, the Church to Peter. They are like Hagar and Sarah, of whom today's Epistle says:

*It is written that Abraham had two sons*, etc. [Gal 4.22ff]

Hagar the slave-girl (her name means ‘solemn’) stands for the Synagogue, which gloried in the observance of the Law and its solemnities. Sarah (‘a coal’) stands for Holy Church, set alight by the fire of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The son of the former, the Jewish people, is in opposition to the son of the latter, the believing people.

Alternatively, Sarah (‘princess’) stands for the higher part of reason, which ought to command like a mistress the slave-girl Hagar (‘vulture’), sensuality, which like a vulture follows the corpses of carnal desire. Her son, carnal impulse, persecutes the son of the other, the movement of reason. So the Apostle says:

*The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh*, [Gal 5.17]

that she may cast her out, and her son. So it is said:

*Cast out the bondmaid and her son*. [Gal 4.30]

The flesh, weighed down with the goods of nature and temporal wealth, rises against her mistress, and theee comes to pass what Solomon speaks of in Proverbs:

*By these three things the earth is disturbed, and the fourth it cannot bear:*

*by a slave when he reigneth;*

*by a fool when he is filled with meat;*

*by an odious woman when she is married;*

*and by a bondwoman when she is heir to her mistress*. [Prov 30.21-23]

The slave reigning is the recalcitrant body; the fool filled with meat is the mind drunk with pleasure; the odious woman is vicious behaviour, which is ‘married’ when the sinner is trapped in the bonds of evil habit; and the slave Hagar, sensuality, becomes heir to her mistress, reason. It was so that this unhappy domination might be dissolved that the Lord fed five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes.

5. There is a **concordance** to this in the Introit of the Mass:

*Rejoice, Jerusalem, and gather together with her*, etc. [Is 66.10-11]

We may divide the number five thousand into five assemblies: the first took place in heaven, the second in paradise, the third on the Mount of Olives, the fourth in Jerusalem

and the fifth at Corinth.

In the first assembly, discord was born. The first angel was at first a white monk, then a black. At first he was a light-bearer, then he became a bearer of darkness. He sowed the tares of discord among the ranks of his brethren. In the choir of harmony he began to sing the Antiphon of pride, not from below but from above:

*I will ascend to heaven, to equality with God, and I will be like the Most High*, [cf. Is 14.13]

that is, like the Son. While he was singing so loudly, and the veins of his heart were swelling, he fell irreparably, because the firmament was unable to bear his pride.

The second assembly was in paradise, and there disobedience was born. Because of it, our first parents were driven out into this wretched exile.

In the third assembly came simony, the buying and selling of something spiritual, or something connected with the spiritual. What could be more spiritual or more holy than Christ, whom Judas sold? And so, we may believe, he fell into the peril of simony. He hanged himself, and burst asunder [cf. Acts 1.18]. In the same way, every simoniac who does not resign and truly repent will be hanged by the noose of eternal damnation, and burst asunder.

In the fourth assembly, poverty was transgressed when Ananias and Sapphira, for the sake of the money they had sold their field for, held on to their property and lied to the Holy Spirit. For this, they suffered all at once the sentence of manifest vengeance [cf. Acts 5.1-10]. In the same way, those who do not renounce what is theirs, and sign themselves with the seal of holy poverty, will bear for ever a reproach and a curse if they attempt to rebuild Jericho after it has been destroyed.

In the fifth assembly, chastity was lost. We read in the Epistle to the Corinthians that Paul did not hesitate to pass sentence of excommunication on that fornicator who took his father’s wife, to the destruction of the flesh [cf. 1Cor 5.1-5].

You who are members of the Church and citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, form this heavenly assembly, excluding the tares of discord, the madness of disobedience, the greed of simony, the leprosy of avarice and the uncleanness of lust; so that you may be counted among the five thousand, and fed with the five loaves and two fishes, perfected with a thousand-fold perfection. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes* in Ps. 31 PL 36.264,266

[2] SOLINUS, *Polyhistor*, 40

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

**(The Gospel for the fifth Sunday of Lent: *Which of you shall convince me of sin?* which is divided into seven clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for preachers or prelates: *Strengthen yourselves, ye sons of Benjamin*.)**

1. *Which of you shall convince me of sin? If I say the truth to you, why do you not believe me?* [Jn 8.46]

Jeremiah says to preachers:

*Strengthen yourselves, ye sons of Benjamin, in the midst of Jerusalem, and sound the trumpet in Thecua, and set up the standard over Bethacarem*. [Jer 6.1]

Benjamin is ‘son of the right hand’; Jerusalem, ‘vision of peace’; Thecua, ‘a trumpet’; Bethacarem, ‘sterile house’. Strengthen yourselves, then, and do not be afraid, you preachers, you sons of Benjamin, of the right hand of eternal life; of which is said:

*Length of days is in her right hand*. [Prov 3.16]

Strengthen yourselves in the midst of Jerusalem, of the Church Militant, in which is the vision of peace, the reconciliation of sinners. In the midst, yes, because at the heart of the Church is charity, which extends to friend and foe alike. The preacher must strengthen the faithful of the Church to hold on to that ‘midst’. In Thecua- in those who, whenever they do anything, *blow a trumpet before them like the hypocrites* [cf. Mt 6.2], who *please themselves in multitudes of nations* [Wisd 6.3]- sound the trumpet of preaching, so that when they hear it they may say*, Woe to us, because we have sinned, Lord* [Lam 5.16]. And over Bethacarem, the sterile house of those dried up of the moisture of grace, sterile of good works, whose minds are not ground that receives the drops of blood that flow from the body of Christ [cf. Lk 22.44], set up the standard of the Cross. Preach the Passion of the Son of God, because the season of the Passion is now here. Proclaim it to the dead, that they may rise up in the death of Jesus Christ, who in today’s Gospel said to the Jewish crowds, *Which of you can convince me of sin?*

2. There are seven points to note in this Gospel:

the innocence of Jesus Christ, who says: *Which of you can convince me of sin?*

the careful hearing of his words: *He that is of God heareth the words of God;*

the blasphemy of the Jews: *Do not we say that thou art a Samaritan, and has a devil?*

the glory of eternal life for those who keep his word:

*Amen, amen, I say to you, If any man keep my word, he shall not see death for ever;*

the glorification by the Father: *It is my Father that glorifieth me;*

the rejoicing of Abraham: *Abraham, your father, rejoiced that he might see my day*;

the deliberate stoning by the Jews, and the hiding of Jesus: *They took up stones to cast at him*.

Note that on this Sunday and next, Jeremiah is read; and the responsories "These are the days .. etc."[1] are sung without the "Glory be to the Father ..."

[THE FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the Passion of Christ: *Christ being come*.)**

3. Let is the innocent Lamb, *who takes away the sins of the world* [cf. Jn 1.29], *who did no sin, neither was guilt found in his mouth* [1Pt 2.22], *who hath borne the sins of many and hath prayed for the transgressors* [Is 55.12], say: *Which of you shall convince* (that is, shall accuse or convict) *me of sin?* Surely there is not one! How could anyone accuse of sin the one who came to free us from sin and give us eternal life? In today's Epistle, the Apostle says:

*Christ, being come a high priest of the good things to come*. [Heb 9.11]

Christ is present to help and to obey. He comes to help us, for

*He helped the poor out of poverty*. [Ps 106.41]

The human race was poor, despoiled of grace and wounded in its natural powers], and it remained so, without anyone to help it. Then Christ came and stood by, helping it by loosing its sins. He stood by, also, as obedient to God the Father, to death, even death on a cross [cf. Phil 2.8], where he offered not the blood of goats or of oxen, but his own

blood to reconcile the human race to God, to cleanse our consciences from dead works to serve the living God [cf. Heb 9.13-14]. He is called high priest of good things to come. He is a 'pontiff', a 'bridge-builder' for those who follow his way. There are two banks: the nearer is mortality, the further is immortality. Between them flows an impassable river, our iniquity and misery, of which Isaiah says:

*Your iniquities have divided between you and God;*

*and your sins have hid his face from you, that he should not hear*. [Is 59.2]

Christ came, standing by as High Priest, and made himself a bridge from the bank of our mortality to that of his own immortality. He was like a plank laid across, for us to pass over to take possession of the good things to come. He is called high priest of good things to come, not of present ones, because he does not promise the latter to his friends. Indeed, he says:

*In the world you will have distress*. [Jn 16.23]

Christ, standing by to loose our sins, is the high priest of good things to come, so as to give us eternal goods. Who can accuse him of sin? Sin is nothing but an offence against divine law, and disobedience to heavenly commandments. Who can accuse him of sin,

*Whose will was in the law of God*, [Ps 1.2]

who obeyed not only his heavenly Father, but even his poor little mother? Which of you can convince me of sin? If I speak the truth to you, why do you not believe me? They did not believe the truth, because they were children of the devil, a liar and the father of lies [Jn 8.44], children of that falsehood which he originated.

**(On the second clause.**

**A sermon for those who hear, and against those who will not hear, the word of the Lord: Arise and go down: *To whom shall I speak*, and: *Behold, I will bring*.)**

4. There follows, secondly: *He that is of God heareth the words of God; therefore you hear them not, because you are not of God* [Jn 8.47]. The root sense of the word 'God' in Hebrew and in Latin is 'awe' or 'fear'. a person is 'of God' if he fears God; and whoever fears God listens to his words. So the Lord says through Jeremiah:

*Arise, and go down into the potter's house; and there thou shalt hear my word*. [Jer 18.2]

Someone 'rises' when, struck by fear, he repents of what he has done; he 'goes down to the potter's house' when he recognizes that he is clay, and fears lest the Lord *shatter him like an earthenware pot* [cf. Ps 2.9]. There he 'hears the word of God', because he is

of God, and fears God. St Jerome[2] says, "It is a great sign of predestination to hear the words of God freely, and to listen to the talk of his kingdom with as much gladness as do those who listen to the talk of the earthly kingdom." The opposite sign is obstinacy, and so there is added, Therefore you hear them not, because you are not of God. The implication is that if you do not listen to his words, it is because you do not fear him. So Jeremiah says:

*To whom shall I speak? And to whom shall I testify, that he may hear? Behold, their ears are uncircumcised, and they cannot hear. Behold, the word of the Lord is become unto them a reproach, and they will not receive it*. [Jer 6.10]

And again:

*Thus saith the Lord: I will make the pride of Judah* (i.e. the clergy*) and the great pride of Jerusalem* (i.e. religious) *to rot; this wicked people* (i.e. the laity) *that will not hear my words and that walk in the perverseness of their heart*. [Jer 13.9-10]

and yet again:

*They are become great and enriched. They are grown gross and fat: and have most wickedly transgressed my words. They have not judged the cause of the widow... Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord? Or shall not my soul take revenge on such a nation?* [Jer 5.28-29]

and:

*Behold I will bring evils upon the people, the fruits of their own thoughts: because they have not heard my words, and they have cast away my law. To what purpose do you bring me frankincense from Saba, and the sweet-smelling cane from a far country? Your holocausts are not acceptable, nor are your sacrifices pleasing to me*. [Jer 6.19-21]

Saba is ‘a net’ or ‘captive’; incense is prayer; the cane is the confession of sin, or of praise. He who does not hear the words of God and casts off his law, which is charity (for *love is the fulfilling of the law* [Rom 13.10]), offers in vain to the Lord the incense of prayer from Saba (the vanity of the world, in which he is netted and held), and the cane of compassion, sweet-smelling if it is done in charity, from a far country (the uncleanness of the mind that separates a man from God). Your holocausts (abstinences) are not acceptable, and your sacrifices (alms) are not pleasing to me, says the Lord, because you have cast away charity. What more? All our works are useless as regards eternal life, if they are not seasoned with the balm of charity.

**(On the third clause.**

**A sermon on Christ’s care for us and his patience amid the blasphemies of the**

**Jews: *What seest thou, Jeremiah?* and: *Woe is me, my mother*.)**

5. There follows, thirdly:

*The Jews therefore answered and said to him: Do not we say well that thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil? Jesus answered: I have not a devil; but I honour my Father. And you have dishonoured me. But I seek not my own glory; there is one that seeketh and judgeth*. [Jn 8.48-50]

the Samaritans, who had been established by the Assyrians, held to a religion partly of Jewish origin and partly Gentile [cf. 4(2)Kg 17.24,33,41], and the Jews had no dealings with them [cf. Jn 4.9], reckoning them as unclean. So when they wished to insult someone, they called him ‘a Samaritan’. The word means ‘guardian’, because the Babylonians set them to keep watch on the Jews. This is why they said, *Do not we say well that thou art a Samaritan*; and by not denying it he accepted the word, being the guardian of Israel *who neither slumbers nor sleeps* [cf. Ps 120.4], and keeps watch over his flock. So the Lord says to Jeremiah:

*What seest thou, Jeremiah? And I said: I see a rod watching* (or, according to another translation, *an almond branch*). *And the Lord said to me: Thou hast seen well, for I will watch over my word, to perform it*. [Jer 1.11]

The rod, strong and green, and a symbol of ruling power, stands for Jesus Christ, who is *the strength of God* [1Cor 1.24], *planted by the running water* of abundant grace [Ps 1.3], green in that he was free from all sin. He says of himself,

*If they do these things in the green wood, what shall be done in the dry?* [Lk 23.31]

The Father says to him,

*Rule them with a rod of iron*, [Ps 2.9]

that is, in unbending justice. This rod watches over his word, to perform it, because what he preached by his word he showed forth by his actions. Whoever practises what he preaches ‘watches over his word’.

6. Alternatively, Christ is called ‘a rod watching’ because, like a thief who stays awake at night and steals things from the houses of sleepers, using a rod with a hook on it, Christ with the rod of his humanity and the hook of his holy Cross steals souls from the devil. So he says,

*When I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all things to myself* [Jn 12.32]

with the hook of the holy Cross.

*The Day of the Lord cometh like a thief in the night*, [1Thess 5.2]

and,

*If thou shalt not watch, I will come to thee as a thief.* [Apoc 3.3]

Again, Christ is called a 'rod of almond'. The centre of an almond is sweet, the shell is hard and the skin is bitter. "The sweet centre is Christ's divinity, the hard shell is his soul, and the bitter skin his flesh which bore the bitterness of the Passion."[3] He keeps watch over the Father's word (which he calls his own, because he is one with the Father) to perform it. So he says, *As the Father hath given me commandment, so do I* [Jn 14.51]. Therefore I do not have a devil, because I do the commandment of the Father. The false Jews blasphemed falsely: *Thou hast a devil!* Jeremiah says, in the person of Christ, regarding their blasphemy:

*Woe is me, my mother! Why hast thou borne me, a man of strife, a man of contention to all the earth? I have not lent on usury, neither hath any man lent to me on usury; yet all curse me, saith the Lord.* [Jer 15.10-11]

There are two kinds of woe- that of guilt and that of punishment. Christ suffered the woe of punishment, but not that of guilt. *Woe is me, my mother! Why hast thou borne me* for so great a punishment, a man of strife and discord? Strife occurs among groups of people who, like dogs, are ready to fight over anything. Discord suggests a division within the heart. There was strife among the Jews over the words of Christ. Like dogs, they barked and contradicted each other. *They were divided in heart: some said He is a good man; others, No, he just misleads the crowds* [cf. Jn 7.12].

*I have not lent on usury, neither hath any man lent me on usury*. Both lender and borrower are involved in usury; but Christ did not find any among the Jews to whom he might advance the capital of his teaching, nor did anyone make him a return, being unwilling to add to his teaching the interest of good deeds. Indeed, all curse me, saying, *Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil*. Jesus replied, I have not a devil. He denied the falsehood, but, being patient, he did not return the abuse. I honour my Father, showing him the honour due to him, attributing everything to him; But you dishonour me. So, in the person of Christ, Jeremiah says in Lamentations:

*I am made a derision to all my people all day long*; [Lam 3.14]

and:

*He shall give his cheek to him that striketh him, he shall be filled with reproaches*. [Lam 3.30]

I do not seek my own glory, as men do who retaliate for insults offered; but I leave it to

my Father. He adds, There is one who seeks and judges. So he says in Jeremiah:

*But thou, O Lord of Sabaoth, who judgest justly and triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy revenge on them*. [Jer 11.20]

There are two senses of 'judgement': condemnation (in which sense it is said *that The Father judgeth not any man, but hath given all judgement to the Son* [Jn 5.22]; and discernment, of which the Son says in the Introit of today's Mass:

*Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause from the nation that is not holy*. [Ps 42.1]

Accordingly, it is the Father who seeks my glory, and distinguishes it from yours, because you glory according to the world, whereas I do not- but by *that glory which I had with the Father before the world was made* [Jn 8.50], quite different from human glory that puffs up.

7. Morally. *Thou hast a demon*. The Greek *daimonion* suggests 'skilled' or 'knowing', and a *daimon* is a skilled person. When someone says to you, by way of flattery or praise, "What an expert you are! What a lot you know!" he is saying, "You have a *daimon*." You should immediately reply with Christ, "I have not a *daimon*. Of myself, I know nothing; I have nothing good. But I honour my Father, I attribute everything to him and give him thanks, from whom comes all wisdom, skill and knowledge. I do not seek my own glory." Say with St Bernard[4] : "Touch me not, vainglorious word! To him alone is glory due, to whom we say: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit." He says also, "No angel in heaven seeks glory from another angel. Shall man on earth seek to be praised by man?"

**(On the fourth clause.**

**A sermon on the glory and the downfall of our first parent: *A plentiful olive-tree*.)**

8. There follows, fourthly:

*Amen, amen, I say to you: If any man keep my word, he shall not taste death for ever. The Jews therefore said: Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest: If any man keep my word, he shall not taste death for ever. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom dost thou make thyself? Jesus answered: If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing.* [Jn 8.51-53]

*Amen*, a Hebrew word, like *alleluia*, means 'truly', 'faithfully', 'let it be so'. In the Apocalypse, John heard in heaven both *Amen* and *Alleluia*. In the same way, the Apostles have handed on those two words to be spoken to all nations. *Amen, amen, I say to you: If any man keep my word, he shall not taste death for ever*. The bite of death

comes from the first man biting the fruit of the forbidden tree. If he had kept the word of the Lord,

*Of every tree of paradise thou shalt eat; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat,* [Gen 2.16-17]

he would not have tasted death for ever. Because he did not keep it, he tasted death and perished with all his posterity. So Jeremiah says:

*The Lord called thy name, a plentiful olive-tree, fair, fruitful and beautiful; at the noise of a great word a fire was kindled in it, and the branches thereof are burnt*. [Jer 11.16]

Human nature before sin was like the olive-tree in nature, created in the field of Damascus, but planted (if I may so express it) in the paradise of delight; plentiful and fertile in grace, fair in natural gifts, fruitful in the fruition of eternal blessedness, beautiful in its purity. But alas! At the noise of a great word, the devil's suggestion, promising great things: *You will be as gods*, the fire of vainglory and avarice was kindled in it, and so its branches, all its posterity, were burnt. O children of Adam, do not imitate your fathers, who did not keep the word of the Lord, and so perished. Keep it; for, *Amen, amen, I say to you: If any man keep my word, he shall not taste death for ever*. 'Taste', here, means the same as 'experience'.

**(A sermon on the mortification of the just man: *The days of his life*.)**

9. There follows: *The Jews therefore said: Now we know that thou hast a devil*. What madness, what insanity! How faithless that devilish people! It is not enough to blaspheme once, with so horrible and unspeakable an accusation, against an innocent man free from all sin: you repeat it a second time! *Now we know that thou hast a devil*. You blind people! If only you had known, you would not have thought him to have had a devil, you would have believed him to be the Lord, the Son of God!

Abraham is dead, but not by that death which the Lord spoke of, only by the death of the body, as Genesis tells:

*And the days of Abraham's life were a hundred and seventy-five years. And decaying he died in a good old age, having lived a long time, and being full of days; and was gathered to his people. And Isaac and Ismael, his sons, buried him in the double cave*. [Gen 25.7-9]

10. Morally. Abraham stands for the just man, whose life must comprise one hundred and seventy-five years. The number one hundred, a perfect number, denotes all the perfection of the just man. Seventy (seven multiplied by ten) indicates the seven-fold infusion of grace and the fulfilling of the ten commandments. Five indicates clean living as to the five senses. So the life of the just man should be perfect, with infusion of seven-fold grace and observance of the ten commandments, living cleanly as to the five

senses. In this way he separates himself from worldly love and is dead to sin, full and not empty of days, and is gathered to his people. The Lord says in Isaiah:

*As the days of a tree* (i.e. like Jesus Christ*) so shall be the days of my people*. [Is 65.22]

Because he is eternal, his people will live and reign with him for ever. So it says in the Gospel: *I live and you will live* [Jn 14.19].

*And Isaac and Ismael, his sons, buried him in the double cave*. Isaac means 'joy', and Ismael 'hearing God'. Joy in the hope of heavenly things, and hearing the divine precepts, bury the just man in the double cave of the active and the contemplative life, so that,

*Hidden in the secret of God's face from the disturbance of men,*

*he will be protected from the contradiction of tongues*. [cf. Ps 30.21-22]

Regarding this contradiction, there is added, *What dost thou make thyself?* According to them, he made himself Son of God, equal to Him; although he was not. But he did not 'make himself', he really was Son of God. So the Apostle says:

*He thought it not robbery to be equal with God*. [Phil 2.6]

They did not ask, "Who are you?" but "Who do you make yourself to be?" If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. In answer to, "Who do you make yourself?" he refers his glory to the Father, from whom it is that He is God.

**(On the fifth clause.**

**A sermon on the glorification of Christ: *It is my father that glorifieth*.)**

11. There follows, fifthly:

*It is my Father that glorifieth me, of whom you say that he is your God, and you have not known him; but I know him, and if I shall say that I know him not, I shall be like you, a liar. But I do know him and do keep his word.* [Jn 8.54-55]

The Father glorified his Son in his Nativity, when he made him to be born of a Virgin; at the river Jordan, and on the mountain, when he said, This is my beloved Son. He glorified him in the raising of Lazarus, and in the Resurrection and the Ascension. So he said in John:

*Father, glorify thy name. A voice therefore came from heaven:*

*I have both glorified it* (in the raising of Lazarus)

*and will glorify it again* (in the Resurrection and Ascension). [Jn 12.28]

It is therefore the Father who glorifies me, who you say is your God. This is direct evidence against those heretics who say that the Law of Moses was given by the God of Darkness. "The God of the Jews, who gave the Law to Moses, is the Father of Jesus Christ; therefore the Father of Jesus Christ gave the Law to Moses."[5] And you have not known him spiritually, since you serve him for earthly reasons; but I know him, because I am one with him. If I were to say that I do not know him, when I do know him, I would be like you, a liar: a man who says he does not know, when he does. But I know him and I keep his word. As Son, he spoke the word of the Father; he himself was the Word of the Father, speaking to men. He keeps himself, the Godhead within him.

**(On the sixth clause.**

**A sermon on the Nativity of the Lord: *In that day, a fountain shall come forth*.)**

12. There follows, sixthly:

*Abraham, your Father, rejoiced that he might see my day; he saw it and was glad. The Jews therefore said to him: thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said to them: Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am*. [Jn 8.56-58]

He rejoiced, he saw, he was glad: note that the Lord's Day is threefold- that of the Nativity, that of the Passion and that of the Resurrection. Of the first, Joel says:

*In that day ... a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord,*

*and shall water the torrent of thorns*. [Joel 3.18]

In the day of the Nativity, a fountain (Christ) shall come forth from the house of the Lord (the womb of the blessed Virgin), and shall water the torrent of thorns (refreshing our abounding misery, wherewith we are pierced and wounded every day).

Of the second, Isaiah says:

*He hath meditated with his severe spirit in the day of heat*. [Is 27.8]

On the day of the Passion, when the Lord suffered heat, labour and pain, with his severe spirit as he hung on the Cross, he meditated how he might defeat the devil and rescue the human race from his hand.

**(A sermon on the four gifts of the glorified body: *On the third day he will raise us*, and on the properties of the vulture and the crane.)**

Of the third, Hosea says:

*On the third day he will raise us up and we shall live in his sight. We shall know and we shall follow on, that we may know the Lord*. [Hos 6.3]

On the third day, Christ rose from the dead and raised us up with him, conformed to his resurrection. Just as he himself rose, so we believe that we too will rise in the general resurrection. Then we shall live, and know, and follow on, that we may know. In these four words we recognize the four gifts of the glorified body: immortality (we shall live), subtlety (we shall know), agility (we shall follow) and brightness (we shall know the Lord).

So Abraham, the just man, rejoices over the Word Incarnate on the day of the Nativity; with the eye of faith he sees him hanging on the gibbet of the Cross; and he will be glad with him when, immortal, he is with him in the heavenly kingdom.

The Jews therefore said to him (thinking only of the age of his body, not considering his divine nature), *Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?* Although the Lord was thirty- one or, maybe, thirty-two years old, he looked older because of his hard labour and unceasing preaching. Jesus said to them, *Before Abraham was, I am*; or rather, not before Abraham was, but before he came to be, for he was a creature. But then he said, not, ‘I was made’, but, ‘I am’, because he is the Creator.

**(On the seventh clause.**

**A sermon against the ungrateful: *Am I become a wilderness to Israel?*)**

13. There follows, seventhly:

*They took up stones therefore to cast at him. But Jesus hid himself and went out of the Temple.* [Jn 8.59]

The Jews resorted to stones, that they might stone him who is the Corner Stone, who in himself joined together the two walls (the Jewish people and the Gentiles) who were opposed. The Jews imitated their fathers’ malice, and wanted to stone the Lord of the prophets, just as their fathers had stoned Jeremiah in Egypt. The Lord himself said:

*You are the sons of them that killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of you fathers*. [Mt 23.31]

14. Morally. False christians, children of another (the devil), have lied to God and violated their Baptismal covenant. As far as they can, every day they stone, with the hard

stones of their sins, their Lord and father Jesus Christ, after whom they are called christians. They try to kill him- that is, his faith. They are like the offspring of the vulture, who let their father die of hunger; not like the offspring of the crane, who expose themselves to death for their father's sake, when the falcon attacks him. They form a 'six' around him and protect him, so that he cannot be hunted. Our father, like a needy poor man, knocks at the door for us to open to him and give him a crust of bread, if not a meal:

*I stand at the gate and knock. If any man shall hear my voice and open to me the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me*. [Apoc 3.20]

We degenerates, like vulture's children, let our father die of hunger, so that he complains through Jeremiah:

*Am I become a wilderness to Israel, or a lateward springing land? Why then have my people said: We are revolted, we will come to thee no more? Will a virgin forget her ornament, or a bride her stomacher? But my people have forgotten me days without number*. [Jer 2.31-32]

The Lord is no wilderness, or late-yielding land which produces little or no fruit. He is the paradise of the Lord, a land of blessing in which whatever we sow we reap a hundredfold.

Why then do we miserably depart from him and forget him for so long a time? The soul, Christ's Bride, a virgin in faith and love, cannot forget her ornament, the divine love with which she began. She cannot forget her stomacher, the pure conscience in which she stands secure. Beloved brothers, let us be like the offspring of the crane. If necessary, let us expose ourselves to death for our father's sake, for the faith of our father. In this ageing world, soon to perish, let us refresh him with good works, lest perchance it happens to us that Jesus hid himself and went out of the Temple. It is for this reason that from this Sunday, named after the Passion of the Lord, the "Glory be to the Father" is omitted from the responsories; although it is not entirely silent yet, because the Lord has not yet been betrayed into the hands of his enemies.

Let us pray then, and with tears beseech the Lord Jesus Christ, that he hide not his face from us, nor go out of the temple of our hearts. May he not accuse us of sin in his judgement, but pour upon us grace to hear his word carefully. May he give us patience when we suffer injury, and free us from eternal death. May he glorify us in his kingdom, that with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob we may see the day of his eternity. May he grant this, to whom be honour and power, dignity and dominion, for ever and ever. Let all the Church say: Amen.

NOTES

[1] *BREVIARIUM ROMANUM*, Passion Sunday, first response at Matins

[2] The source of this quotation is unknown.

[3] AUGUSTINE, *Sermon* 245, 5 PL 39.2198

[4] BERNARD, *In festo Omnium Sanctorum*, sermon 5,5 PL 183.479; *In Nativitate B.V. Mariae*, 14 PL 183.445

[5] AUGUSTINE, *In Ioannis Evangelium*, tr. 44.5 PL 35.1711

# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## PALM SUNDAY

**(The Gospel for Palm Sunday: *When Jesus drew nigh*, which is divided into four clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for the soul of the sinner on the Passion of Christ: *Go up into Galaad*.)**

1. At that time: *When Jesus drew nigh to Jerusalem and was come to Bethphage, unto mount Olivet*. [Mt 21.1]

Jeremiah says to the sinful soul:

*Go up into Galaad and take balm, O virgin daughter of Egypt*. [Jer 46.11]

The 'daughter of Egypt' is the soul, darkened by the pleasures of this world; Egypt means 'darkness'. Hence Jeremiah says:

*How hath the Lord covered* (i.e. allowed to be covered) *with obscurity the daughter of Sion in his wrath*, [Lam 2.1]

meaning the soul, which ought to be the daughter of Sion! She is called 'virgin' because she is barren of good works. So Jeremiah says again in Lamentations:

*The Lord hath trodden the winepress* (eternal punishment) *for the virgin daughter of Juda*, [Lam 1.15]

because she has remained barren of the offspring of good works. To her is said, *Go up*, with feet of love and steps of devotion, *into Galaad* (which means 'the heap of witness'), the Cross of Jesus Christ, in which many witnesses are heaped up: to whit, the nails and the lance, the gall, the vinegar and the crown of thorns; and from thence *take balm*, the 'tears that flow from a tree'. The most precious of all resins is that of the terebinth. This is a drop of the most precious Blood, which flows from that tree planted in the paradise of delight [cf. Gen 2.8], *beside the flowing waters* [Ps 1.3], for the reconciliation of the human race. O soul, take to yourself this balm, and anoint your wounds: for this is the

best and most efficacious of all medicines for healing wounds, for giving relief and infusing grace. *Go up into Galaad*, go up with Jesus to Jerusalem, for he himself went up for the feast day [cf. Jn 7.8]. So it says in today's Gospel: *When Jesus drew nigh to Jerusalem*.

2. There are four things to note in this Gospel:

First, the approach of Jesus to Jerusalem: *When Jesus drew nigh*. Second, the sending of the two disciples into the village: *Then he sent two of his disciples*. Third, the seating of the meek, poor and humble king upon the ass and its colt: *Tell ye the daughter of Sion.* Fourth, the devotion and acclamation of the crowd: *Hosanna to the son of David*; and: A *very great multitude.*

[THE FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon in praise of the blessed Virgin: *When Jesus drew nigh*, and on the ostrich and its meaning.)**

3. Let us say, then: *When Jesus drew nigh to Jerusalem*. Take note of the route the Lord followed when he travelled to Jerusalem. First at Bethany, then from Bethany to Bethphage, from Bethphage to the Mount of Olives, and from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem. We will first look at the allegorical meaning of this, and then the moral.

Bethany means 'house of obedience', or 'house of the gift of God'. It stands for blessed Mary, who obeyed the voice of the angel, and so was found worthy to receive the heavenly gift, the Son of God. So she was made pleasing above all others to the Lord. Wherefore it is said of her in Proverbs:

*Many daughters have gathered riches; you have surpassed them all*. [Prov 31.29]

The soul of no saint has ever gathered riches as holy Mary has done, who for her outstanding humility was found worthy to conceive and bear the flower of a spotless virginity, the Son of God, who *is God blessed above all* [Rom 9.5].

From this Bethany he came to Bethphage, which means 'the house of a mouth'. This represents his preaching. For this purpose he came first to Bethany, to take flesh of the Virgin, that he might then go on to preaching. As he himself says in Mark:

*Let us go into the neighbouring towns and cities, that I may preach there also; for to this purpose am I come*. [Mk 1.38]

From Bethphage he came to the Mount of Olives, that is, of mercy. The olive tree is a symbol of mercy. The Mount of Olives stands for the excellence of the miracles whereby, being merciful and kind, he showed mercy to the blind, to lepers, to the possessed and

to the dead. In Isaiah, they themselves say:

*Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer: from everlasting is thy name*. [Is 63.16]

Our Father in creation, our Redeemer in the working of miracles: thy name is from everlasting, God, blessed for ever!

And from the Mount of Olives he came to Jerusalem, to fulfil the work of our salvation for which he had come, to redeem the human race (held captive for over five thousand years in the infernal prison) from the hand of the devil, by his own blood. Christ freed us, just as the bird called the ostrich freed its offspring.

It is told[1] that the most wise king Solomon had a bird, an ostrich, whose chick he shut up in a glass vessel. The grieving mother could see it, but could not reach it. So great was her love for her child that she went into the desert and found a certain worm. She brought it back, and crushed it against the glass (because the power of its blood could break glass); and so the ostrich freed her child. Let us see what the bird, the chick, the glass vessel, the desert, the worm and the blood mean. The bird is the divine nature; the chick is Adam and his offspring; the glass vessel is the prison of hell; the desert is the womb of the Virgin; the worm is the humanity of Christ; the blood is his Passion. Therefore, in order to free the human race from the prison of hell, from the hand of the devil, God went into the desert of the Virgin's womb, and from it took human nature. This the 'worm', as he himself said: *I am a worm, not a man* [Ps 21.7], meaning, not just a man, but both God and man. He broke this worm on the wood of the cross, and from his side flowed the blood whose power broke the gates of hell, and freed the human race from the hand of the devil.

**(A moral sermon for converted sinners: *Jesus, six days before the Pasch*.)**

4. Let us see what is the moral significance of Bethany, Bethphage, the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem. John says in his Gospel:

*Jesus, therefore, six days before the Pasch* (i.e. the Saturday before Palm Sunday), *came to Bethania, where Lazarus had been dead, whom Jesus raised to life. And they made him a supper there; and Martha served. But Lazarus was one of those that were at table with him. Mary therefore took a pound of ointment of right spikenard, of great price, and anointed the feet of Jesus*. [Jn 12.1-3]

Matthew and Mark say that she poured it on his head as he reclined [cf. Mt 26.7; Mk 14.3]. Bethany means 'house of affliction', the contrition of heart of which the prophet says:

*I am afflicted and humbled exceedingly: I roared with the groaning of my heart*. [Ps 37.9]

In this house Lazarus (whose name means ‘helped’) was restored to life. In the house of contrition the sinner is restored to life when he is helped by divine grace; and so he says with the prophet:

*In him hath my heart confided, and I have been helped*. [Ps 27.7]

When the heart trusts, grace helps. The heart hopes for pardon, when the pain of contrition for sin torments it.

There follows: *They made him a supper there, and Martha served*. The two sisters of the sinner who is restored from death, Martha (‘provoking’, ‘irritating’) and Mary (‘star of the sea’), are the fear of punishment and the love of glory. The fear of punishment provokes the sinner to weeping, and worries at him like a dog trying to find something, so that he confesses his sins and their circumstances. The love of glory gives light, fear makes satisfaction, love soothes. Martha served. What does fear serve? Assuredly, the bread of sorrow and the wine of compunction. This is the supper of Jesus, of which Matthew says:

*Whilst they were at supper, Jesus took bread and broke and gave to his disciples ... And taking the chalice, he gave thanks and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of this*. [Mt 26.26-27]

*Lazarus was one of them that were at table with Jesus*. He ate and drank to prove that he was no ghost, but that his resurrection was real. What a great grace! The sinner, who previously lay dead, now sits down and feasts with Jesus and his disciples. Previously he desired to fill his belly (his mind) with the husks of swine (of unclean devils), and no-one would give him anything [cf. Lk 15.12].

There follows: *Mary therefore took a pound of ointment of right spikenard, of great price*. The pound is made up of twelve ounces, so that it is a kind of perfect weight, having as many ounces as there are months in the year. The pound is as it were a standard weight, from which others are measured. the ‘right nard’ is pure and unadulterated (from the Greek for ‘faith’), and the pound, made up of twelve ounces, is the faith of the twelve Apostles, the perfect standard. Mary, then, the love of heavenly glory, anoints with pure nard, the apostolic faith, the ‘head’ of Divinity and the ‘feet’ of humanity. Thus she confesses Christ as God and man, who was born and who suffered. In this way the house of the penitent (his conscience) is filled with the scent of the ointment [cf. Jn 12.3], and he says with the Bride in the Canticles, "O Lord Jesus, *draw me after you with the cord of your love, that I may run after the scent of your ointments*" [cf. Cant 1.3], so that I may come from Bethany to Bethphage.

5. Bethphage means ‘house of a mouth’, standing for confession. In this we should be like householders, not just ‘guests of a passing night’ [cf. Wisd 5.15], lest there should happen to us what Jeremiah says:

*Thus saith the Lord to this people that have loved to move their feet and have not rested and have not pleased the Lord: He will now remember their iniquities and visit their sins*. [Jer 14.10]

**(A sermon on the three-fold light of the mount of Olives, and its meaning.)**

*And from Bethphage he came to the Mount of Olives*. The Mount of Olives has been called ‘the mount of three lights’, because it is lit by the sun, by itself and by the Temple. It is lit by the sun, because as it faces east it receives the rays of the sun. It is lit by itself, because of the plentiful oil it produces. It is lit by the Temple, because of the lamps that burn there at night and light up the mount. The Mount of Olives stands for the excellence of satisfaction to which the penitent should come from the house of confession. Satisfaction may well be called a hill of three lights. When a man makes satisfaction by penance, he is illuminated by the Sun of Justice, Jesus Christ, who says*: I am the Light of the world* [Jn 8.12]. He is illuminated in himself, by the abundance of ‘oil’ (mercy) that he should have for himself and his neighbour. So Job says: *Visiting thy beauty thou shalt not sin* [Job 5.24]. A certain saint has said that the best way for the soul to see its beauty above, by truth, is for the flesh to bow itself down by charity to its beauty below. He is also illuminated by the Temple, the assembly of the faithful, to whom the Apostle says:

*The Temple of God is holy, which you are*. [1Cor 13.17]

And from the Mount of Olives he comes to Jerusalem; because these three- contrition of heart, confession by mouth, and satisfaction in deed- lead to the light, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to eternal happiness. So it is well said, *When Jesus drew nigh to Jerusalem*.

**(On the second clause. A sermon against religious and clergy, who are signified by the she-ass and her foal: *Then he sent two of his disciples*.)**

6. There follows, secondly:

*Then Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them: Go ye into the village that is over against you; and immediately you shall find an ass tied and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to me*. [Mt 21.1-2]

We must see what is the moral significance of the two disciples, the village, the ass and its colt. The word ‘disciple’, like ‘discipline’, comes from a root meaning ‘to learn’. The village (*castellum*) may be pictured as having a wall round it and a tower in the middle. The she-ass is an animal that avoids high places, and her colt (being new-born) would be ‘unclean’. The two disciples of the just man, who learn the discipline of peace, are contempt for the world and lowliness of heart.

These two disciples are Moses and Aaron, who led the Hebrews out of Egypt. They are

the two poles for carrying the ark of the covenant, and the two cherubim facing one another, looking at the mercy-seat. Moses represents contempt for the world. As the Apostle says to the Hebrews, he considered the reproach of Jesus Christ greater riches than the treasure of the Egyptians [Heb 11.26]. Aaron represents lowliness of heart. As the Book of Numbers tells, he extinguished the fire, and placated the wrath of God lest it rage against the people [cf. Num 16.46]. Humility puts out the fire of the devil's temptation, and placates the wrath of divine judgement. These two disciples are like the unbending poles which carry the ark of the covenant, the teaching of Jesus Christ, or obedience to a superior. They look towards the mercy-seat, Jesus Christ himself, who is *the propitiation for our sins* [cf. 1Jn 4.10]. They look towards him, I say, lying in the manger, hanging on the cross and buried in the tomb.

The just man sends these two disciples, saying, *Go into the village which is over against you*. This 'castle' consists of a wall and a tower. The wall denotes the abundance of temporal things, and the tower is the pride of the devil. Just as, in a wall, stone is placed upon stone, and held together with mortar: so in temporal abundance money is piled on money, house added to house and field joined to field [cf. Is 5.8], and all is firmly held together with the mortar of covetousness. Of this wall Isaiah says:

*My bowels shall sound like a harp for Moab, and my inward parts for a brick wall*; [Is 16.11]

and Jeremiah uses almost identical words:

*My heart shall sound for Moab like pipes;*

*and my heart shall sound like pipes for the men of the brick wall*. [Jer 48.36]

Harp and pipes denote the melody of preaching. With a compassionate heart and with the melody of preaching, Isaiah or Jeremiah (that is, any preacher) should sound for Moab (meaning 'from the father'), the sinner who is of his father the devil. He builds a wall made of hard baked clay, temporal abundance; it is baked with the fire of relentless avarice, yet it is still clay, and quick to fall. The tower denotes the pride of the devil. It is the Tower of Babel ('confusion'), and the tower of Siloe which, as St Luke tells, fell and killed eighteen men [cf. Lk 13.4]. Against this castle the just man sends his two disciples, contempt for the world (to pull down the wall of transitory wealth) and humility of heart (to cast down the tower of pride).

7. How appropriate are the words *over against you*. Temporal abundance is always contrary to poverty, and pride to humility. In the castle is found the she-ass, bound, with her colt. The ass, which avoids high places but goes along the flat, is the life of clergy and religious who avoid the heights of contemplation and plod lazily along the flats of carnal pleasure. Alas! With how many chains of pleasure, with how many cords of sin, this ass is held bound! And her colt with her. This ass's colt is the cleric or religious who is polluted with many vices. He is to be found with the ass, sucking her teats from behind

to get the milk of greed and lust. So the Lord complains of them by Jeremiah:

*I fed them to the full, and they committed adultery and rioted in the harlot's house*. [Jer 5.7]

So it says in the same book that the girdle of Jeremiah himself rotted in the river Euphrates, so that it was fit for no use [cf. Jer 13.7]. The girdle of chastity belonging to clergy and religious so rots in the river Euphrates- the name means 'fruitful', worldly wealth, for wickedness proceeds from wealth- that they are fit for no use, but must be cast on the dung-hill of hell.

*Loose them and bring them to me*. O Lord Jesus, what is this you say? Who is there, who is able to loose the bonds of clergy and false religious, the riches and honours that bind them, to subdue their pride and bring them to you? *They are all like a runaway horse*, says Jeremiah [Jer 8.6]; and, *Their course is become evil and their strength unlike* [Jer 23.10], that is, unlike that image and likeness in which you made them [cf. Gen 1.26], unlike that image and likeness because they are polluted with not one but many vices. So he adds:

*The prophet and the priest are defiled: and in my house I have found their wickedness ... They are all become unto me as Sodom and Gomorrha. Therefore thus saith the Lord: Behold, I will fetch them with wormwood* (the bitterness of eternal death) *and will give them gall to drink* (the bitter bite of conscience): *for from the prophets of Jerusalem* (clergy and religious) *corruption is gone forth into all the land.* [Jer 23.11,14,15]

Loose them and bring them to me. Contempt for the world and humility of soul loose all bonds, and bring the ass and the colt to the Lord.

**(On the third clause. A sermon on the humility, poverty and suffering of Christ: *Tell ye the daughter of Sion*.)**

8. There follows, thirdly:

*All this was done that it might be fulfilled what was spoken by the propet* (Zechariah) *saying: Tell ye the daughter of Sion: Behold, thy king cometh to thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass and a colt, the foal of her that is used to the yoke*. [Mt 21.4-5]

The actual words of Zechariah are:

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion; shout for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem.*

*Behold, thy king will come to thee, the just and saviour.*

*He is poor and riding upon an ass and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.*

*And I will destroy the chariot out of Ephraim and the horse out of Jerusalem;*

*and the bow of war shall be broken*. [Zech 9.9-10]

Sion and Jerusalem are the same city, Sion being the citadel of Jerusalem. They stand for the heavenly Jerusalem, in which is the sight of eternity and the vision of lasting peace. Her daughter is Holy Church, and to her, you preachers, say: "Rejoice greatly by your works, and shout for joy in your mind." This joy is conceived as being of such great and heartfelt happiness that words cannot express it. Behold the king, of whom Jeremiah says:

*There is none like to thee, O Lord: thou art great, and great is thy name in might.*

*Who shall not fear thee, O king of nations?* [Jer 10.6-7]

He, as is told in the Apocalypse, *hath on his garment and upon his thigh written: King of kings and Lord of lords* [Apoc 19.16].

The swaddling-clothes are his garment, and his ‘thigh’ is his flesh. At Nazareth he was crowned with flesh as with a diadem; at Bethlehem he was wrapped in swaddling clothes as his purple. These were the first insignia of his reign. At each, the Jews raged, like people wanting to deprive him of his kingdom. In his Passion he was stripped by them of his garments, and pierced with nails. There his kingdom was completely fulfilled, for after crown and purple he lacked only a sceptre; and this he took when he went out, bearing his cross, to the place called Calvary [cf. Jn 19.17]. Isaiah says: *The government was laid upon his shoulder* [Is 9.6], and the Apostle:

*We see Jesus, through suffering death, crowned with glory and honour*. [cf. Heb 2.9]

9. *Behold*, then, *thy King*, coming to you for your benefit; meek, that he may be loved rather than feared for his power; *sitting upon an ass*. Zechariah calls him, *Just and saviour, poor and riding upon an ass*. There are two proper virtues for a king, justice and piety. Your king is just, in respect of justice, rendering to each according to his works. He is meek, and a redeemer, with respect to piety. He is poor, as the Apostle says in today’s Epistle:

*He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant*. [Phil 2.7]

Because Adam, in Paradise, would not serve the Lord, the Lord took the form of a servant, to serve the servant, so that henceforward the servant might not be ashamed to serve the Lord.

*Being made in the likeness of man, and in habit found as a man*. [Phil, loc. cit.]

So Baruch says:

*Afterwards, he was seen upon earth and conversed with men*. [Bar 3.38]

‘As man’ expresses the reality of his manhood; he was not just ‘like’ a man.

*He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross*. [Phil 2.8]

St Augustine[2] says: "Our Redeemer spread before our captor the mouse-trap of the cross; he placed his own blood as bait. The devil shed the blood of one who was not a debtor, and by doing so retreated from those who were debtors." St Bernard[3] says of Christ: "So great was his obedience, that he was ready to lose life itself; being made obedient to the Father even to death, death on the cross." He had nowhere to lay his head [cf. Mt 8.20; Lk 9.58], except that place where, bowing his head, he gave up his spirit [Jn 19.30].

**(A sermon against proud prelates: *I will destroy the chariot out of Ephraim*.)**

10. *He was poor*. Jeremiah says:

*O expectation of Israel, the Saviour thereof in time of trouble:*

*Why wilt thou be as a stranger in the land*

*and as a wayfaring man turning in to lodge?*

*Why wilt thou be as a wandering man,*

*as a mighty man that cannot save?* [Jer 14.8]

Our God, the Son of God, whom we have expected, came and saved us in time of trouble (the devil’s persecution). Like a stranger, a casual labourer, he tilled our land and watered it with the water of his preaching. He was like a wayfarer travelling light, unburdened by sin, and as he revealed his ways he showed that *he rejoiced like a giant to run the way* [Ps 18.6]. He bowed his head on the Cross as he said, *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit* [Lk 23.46]; and he remained in the tomb three days and three nights. He is a wanderer (in the Jews’ estimation), because they thought he was wandering in his wits. He says in John:

*I have power to lay down* (my life) *and I have power to take it up again...*

*And many of them said: He hath a devil and is mad. Why hear you him?* [Jn 10.18,20]

Because he took the form of a servant, he seemed to them powerless to save; but he was a mighty man who with nailed hands overcame the devil. Behold your King comes, meek, sitting upon an ass and a colt, the foal of her that is used to the yoke- that is, the ass herself, made tame by the yoke.

Oh! would that clergy and religious would receive, and like meek animals carry, such a king, such a rider! Then they might be worthy to enter with him the Jerusalem above. But they are sons of Belial (‘without the yoke’) who, as Jeremiah says:

*have walked after vanity and are become vain;*

*and have not said, Where is the Lord?* [Jer 2.6]

They have broken the yoke and burst their bonds, and said: "We will not serve." Therefore the Lord says to them in Zechariah, *I will destroy the chariot out of Ephraim and the horse out of Jerusalem; and the bow for war shall be broken*. A chariot runs on four wheels, and it stands for the wealth of the clergy which consists in these four things: extensive possessions, multiplicity of offices and emoluments, sumptuous food and luxurious clothing. The Lord will destroy the chariot, and cast its rider into the sea of hell [cf. Ex 15.1]; and he will destroy the horse, the foaming and unbridled pride of religious who, under a cloak of religion and a pretence of piety, think themselves great. But,

*Great and powerful is the Lord,*

*who looks on the humble and puts down the mighty*. [Ps 137.6]

He will cast down the horse from the heavenly Jerusalem, which none shall enter except the one who humbles himself like a little child [cf. Mt 18.4]. He humbled himself to death, even death on the cross.

11. Morally. The king sitting upon an ass and its colt is the just man who restrains his body and bridles his appetite. Jeremiah says:

*O virgin of Israel, thou shalt again be adorned with thy timbrels,*

*and shalt go forth in the choir of them that make merry*. [Jer 31.4]

A timbrel is made of skin stretched over wood, and it represents mortification of the flesh. The choir, where voices sound in harmony, is unity and concord. The soul is ‘adorned with timbrels’, and ‘goes forth in the choir of those that make merry’, when she is bedecked with mortification of the flesh, with unity and concord. As the psalmist says: *Praise God with timbrel and with choir* [Ps 150.4].

**(A sermon for a bishop: *The king riding upon an ass*.)**

An alternative meaning is that the king sitting upon an ass is a bishop ruling the people entrusted to him. Solomon says in Ecclesiastes:

*Blessed is the land* (the Church) *whose king is noble; and whose princes* (prelates) *eat in due season, for refreshment and not for riotousness*. [Eccles 10.17]

They only eat to live, they do not live to eat. They eat in due season, not looking for a reward here, but hereafter. Such a ruler should be, as has been said, meek, just, a saviour and poor. He should be meek towards those under him; just towards the proud, pouring in wine and oil; a saviour to the poor; and a poor man among the rich. Or else: he should be meek in bearing injuries, just in giving to each his rights, a saviour in preaching and in prayer, and poor in humility of heart and self abnegation.

Blessed is the ass, blessed the Church, that has such a rider! But today's bishop is more like Balaam, riding an ass that saw the angel which Balaam could not see [cf. Num 22.21-30]. Balaam means 'casting down brotherhood', or 'disturbing the nation', or 'devouring the people'. A useless trunk is that disreputable bishop who by his bad example casts the brotherhood of the faithful down into sin, and then into hell. His lack of wisdom and his stupidity upset the nation, and his avarice devours the people. A man like that sitting on his ass fails to see (so I would say) not an angel, but a devil who is trying to throw him into hell. But the simple people, rightly believing, and behaving well, see the angel of great counsel, and love and recognize the Son of God.

[THE FOURTH CLAUSE]

**(A sermon for imitating the examples of the saints: *You shall take to you the fruits of the tree*.)**

12. There follows, fourthly:

*And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; and others cut boughs from the trees and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before and that followed cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.* [Mt 21.8-9]

Note these three points: they spread their garments; they cut branches; and they shouted Hosanna. The clothes are our bodily members, with which the soul is clothed. Solomon says: At all times let thy garments be white [Eccles 9.8]. We should 'spread them in the way' by exposing them to suffering and death for the name of Jesus, that we may deserve to receive them back glorious and immortal in the general resurrection, when this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruptible incorruption [cf. 1Cor 15.53].

The branches are the examples of the holy fathers, of which the Lord says in Leviticus:

*Ye shall take to you the fruits of the fairest tree, and the branches of palm trees, and boughs of a thick tree, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God*. [Lev 23.40]

The 'fairest tree' is the glorious Virgin Mary, whose fruits are humility and poverty. The 'palms' are the Apostles, who bore the palm of victory from this world. Their branches are ready to bear fruit- the Apostles' faith, hope and charity. The 'tree with thick leaves' is the Cross of Jesus Christ, which spreads the dense foliage of faith over all the world. Its branches are the four corners of the Cross, which were in Christ's hands. In them are four precious stones: mercy, obedience, patience and perseverance. In the upper corner is mercy, to the right obedience, to the left patience and at the lower end perseverance. The 'willows of the brook', which stay green, denote all the saints who in the stream of our present life remain green in good works.

So let us take the fruits of the fairest tree, the poverty and humility of the Virgin Mary; the branches of palm trees, the faith, hope and charity of the Apostles; the boughs of a thick tree, the mercy, obedience, patience and perseverance of the Passion of Jesus Christ; and the willows of the brook, the evergreen works of all the saints; and let us rejoice before the Lord our God, Jesus Christ, saying with the crowds of Hebrew children: *Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!* 'Hosanna' means 'health, or salvation, I pray'; so 'Hosanna' is 'salvation to the Son of David', or 'from the Son of David', or 'through the Son'. 'Blessed' is 'free from sin', so singularly blessed are you, O Christ, who come in the name of the Lord, in honour of God the Father; or who will come again. He who appeared first in the form of a servant will appear at the last in the glory of the Lord. 'Hosanna in the highest', 'salvation on high'; as if to say: "You who saved us by redeeming us on earth, save us, we pray, by gathering us in heaven."

We pray you, then, blessed Jesus: make us draw nigh to Jerusalem by your faith and love. Bring us from the village of our pilgrimage back to you. Rest upon our souls as our King, so that with the children you have chosen out of this world, your Apostles, we may be found worthy to bless, praise and glorify you in the holy city of eternal blessedness. Grant this, you to whom be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. May every faithful soul say: Amen!

NOTES

[1] P. COMESTOR, cf. *Historia Scholastica*, III Kings, 8. PL 198.1353-1354

[2] quoted in P. LOMBARD, *Sententiae* III, dist. 19,1

[3] BERNARD, *Ad milites templi*, 13,31 PL 182.939

# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## EASTER

**(The Gospel for the Lord's Pasch: *Mary Magdalen*, which is divided into four clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for the preacher, on how he ought to make a electuary for the soul from the various virtues: *The apothecary shall make ointments*.)**

1. At that time: *Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought sweet spices, that coming, they might anoint Jesus*, etc.

Ecclesiasticus says:

*The apothecary shall make sweet confections*

*and shall make up ointments of health*. [Ecclus 38.7]

The word 'confections' indicates the process of grinding between pestle and mortar. These confections are those mentioned by the penitent soul in the same book of Ecclesiasticus:

*I yielded a sweet odour like the best myrrh,*

*and.. as storax, and galbanum, and onyx, and gutta*. [Ecclus 24.20-21]

These kinds, as the Gloss says, "are highly prized by physicians, and stand for the kinds of virtue which the true or spiritual physicians use for the healing of men." Myrrh stands for penitence, which cannot be genuine unless it is mixed with the other four kinds, namely storax, galbanum, onyx and gutta. According to the Gloss, storax is a resin which flows from a tree, most sweetly scented, and yielding a honey-like liquid. Galbanum is a kind of resin which by its scent drives away snakes. Onyx (the Greek word is *onycha*, the Latin *ungula*) is mentioned in Exodus, and comes from the hoof, similar to the human nail. Gutta is a kind of ointment used to cure certain callouses and tumours. Thus storax represents tears of contrition which are like a sweet scent in the Lord's sight, and *sweeter than honey and the honey-comb* [cf. Ps 18.11] to the penitent soul. Galbanum

represents confession, which puts those serpents, the demons, to flight. Gutta represents the humility of satisfaction, which heals the hardness of the heart and allays the swelling pride of the body. But because not everyone who begins, but only *he that perseveres to the end* [Mt 10.22], is blessed, to these must be added onyx, the extreme part of the body, which represents final perseverance. The apothecary (that is, the preacher) must pound these ointments in the mortar which is the sinner's heart, with the pestle of preaching; and mix it with the pure balm of divine mercy, so that it may be more palatable and soothing to the penitent soul.

There follows: *And shall make up ointments of health*. The ointment which teaches a man all that he needs to know is made up of two elements: wine and oil. The wine is that which flows from the true vine, and which has been crushed in the wine-press of the cross. The oil is that with which the infant Church was anointed on the day of Pentecost. It is made, then, from the Blood of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit. From these two ingredients the apothecary must make his ointments, so as to anoint the members of Jesus Christ, the faithful of the Church, as did the three women of whom today's Gospel tells us: *Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought sweet spices*, etc.

2. There are four things to note in this Gospel. First, the devotion of the holy women, and their buying spices: *Mary Magdalen*, etc. Second, the rolling away of the stone: *And they said one to another*. Third, the vision of angels: *And entering into the sepulchre*. Fourth, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ: *Who saith to them: Be not affrighted*, etc.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on humility: *Mary Magdalen*.)**

3. Let us say, then: *Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices*, etc.

These three women represent three virtues of our souls: humility of mind, contempt for the world, and joyful peace. Magdalen, named after the village of Magdala (meaning 'tower'), stands for humility of mind. Mary of James (Jacob, 'the supplanter'), the mother of James the Less, stands for contempt of the world. Salome ('peaceful'), the mother of James and of John the Evangelist, stands for the joy of peace. These women are called by the same name, Mary (which means 'enlightener'), because these three virtues enlighten the human mind in which they dwell. We shall say something about each.

Mary Magdalen is the humility of mind which is raised up like a tower inasmuch as it reckons nothing of itself. Hence James says: Let the humble brother glory in his exaltation [Jas 1.9], because he is lifted up by that which humiliates him. This tower is referred to in Genesis, where Jacob *pitched his tent beyond the Flock tower*. [Gen 35.21]

The tower represents humility, the flock pure simplicity. Thus Jacob, the just man,

pitches the tent of his life, wherein he serves (since *his life is a warfare upon earth* [Job 7.1]), beyond the Flock-tower which is firmly based on humility, the mother of pure simplicity. Note that it says ‘beyond the tower’, not ‘in the tower’, because while he lives the just man thinks himself less than he really is.

So John says of the Magdalen:

*Mary stood at the sepulchre without, weeping. Now as she was weeping, she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre, and she saw two angels in white, sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been laid*. [Jn 20.11-12]

Note each word. A sepulchre, or ‘monument’, is a reminder of the dead; thus it is a reminder of our own death, a memorial of our burial. It reminds us to continue in sorrow of heart and in works of penitence. *Mary stood at the sepulchre*, because the humble person maintains a constant awareness of his mortality, so that *when he cometh, he shall find him watching*. [cf. Lk 12.37]

How does she stand? Outside, weeping. Outside, not inside. Outside there is nothing but

*lamentation and great mourning; Rachel bewailing her children*

*and would not be comforted, because they are not*. [Mt 2.18]

Rachel (meaning ‘sheep’) stands for the simple, penitent soul. Her children are her works, which were dead by the commission of sin; and they are no more alive, as the were before they became dead. Alas! The downward path is easy, but how hard is the path up!

"That which was a long time coming to be, falls in a moment."[1]

*As she was weeping, she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre*. There is the true humility of the penitent. Note the three words: wept, stooped, looked. She wept, and there is contrition; she stooped, and there is confession; she looked, and there is satisfaction, which she truly has before her when she directs here eye at the sepulchre of her death.

*And she saw two angels*. These two angels (the word means ‘messengers’) stand, in their moral sense, for our wretched entry into life and our bitter exit. We who are the Body of Jesus Christ have one of these at out head and one at our feet, attending on the wretched beginning and ending of our life. They are well-named ‘angels’, because they announce the frailty of our body and the vanity of the world. These are the two angels who, in Genesis,

*brought Lot forth from Sodom, and said to him:*

*Save thy life; look not back, neither stay thou in all the country about;*

*but save thyself in the mountain, lest thou be also consumed*. [Gen 19.17]

Whoever considers well the beginning and end of his life will go forth from ‘Sodom’, the foulness of the world and of sin, and will save his soul. He will not look back, returning to his former sins, nor will he linger ‘in the country about’; for he who dwells among the occasions and images of sin after he has put sin aside has not yet abandoned sin utterly. He will save himself ‘in the mountain’, that is, in excellence of life. Very properly, then, humility is represented by the Magdalen.

**(A sermon on contempt for the world, and how one should receive the Body of Christ: *Cast out the old leaven*.)**

4. Her companion, appropriately, is Mary the mother of James, whose name means ‘supplanter’. She stands for contempt of the world, which tramples all transitory things underfoot like dust, and rids itself of the leaven of the old way of life. For this reason the Apostle says in today’s Epistle,

*Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new paste, as you are unleavened. For Christ our Pasch is sacrificed*. [1Cor 5.7]

The words ‘ferment’ and ‘fervent’ are related, because fermentation cannot be contained for more than the first hour, but it grows and overflows. The Greek word is *zyma*, and there is a Sequence containing the words:

*Zyma vetus expurgatur,*

*ut sincere praedicatur*

*nova resurrectio*.[2]

That is,

"The leaven old is cast away,

that sincerely we may say,

Christ is risen again!"

The leaven is greed for earthly things and desire for carnal gratification, which after

beginning to ferment becomes unbounded. The miser is not satisfied with the money he has, nor is the libertine sated with fleshly indulgence.

Isaiah says, referring to the avaricious and lustful:

*The wicked are like the raging sea which cannot rest:*

*and the waves thereof cast up dirt and mire.*

*There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord*. [Is 57.20-21]

The ‘waves of the sea’, heaving and restless, are the desires of the perverse man, which break upon his soul and wear it down into the mud of impurity and wretchedness in which the swine (that is, the demons) gladly roll. Purge out, then, the old leaven. The Lord commands in Exodus:

*Seven days there shall not be found any leaven in your houses:*

*he that shall eat leavened bread, his soul shall perish out of the land of Israel*. [Ex 12.19]

Seven days means the whole time of our life, which goes in a seven day cycle. No leaven, fermenting with worldly and fleshly lusts, should be found in your houses, that is, in your hearts. Otherwise, the soul of him who eats it will perish from the land of Israel, which stands for eternal life, in which we shall *see God face to face* [cf. 1Cor 13.12]. Purge out, then, the old leaven, that you may be a new paste, as you are unleavened..

And so Exodus says:

*The people therefore took dough before it was leavened:*

*and tying it in their cloaks, put it on their shoulders*. [Ex 12.34]

And a little later:

*And they baked the meal, which a little before they had brought out of Egypt, in dough,*

*and they made earth cakes unleavened*. [Ex 12.39]

There are three things to note in this text: contrition, confession and satisfaction. The ‘meal’, finely ground flour, the food of invalids, stands for penance, the food of sinners. We must mix it with the water of contrition, bind it in our cloaks (our consciences) with the cord of confession, and carry it on our shoulders by works of satisfaction. We cook this flour, so that it may not ferment, with the fire which is the love of the Holy Spirit, and

we make ‘earth cakes’, the way-bread of our mortality, the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Thus we live sincerely as regards ourselves, and in truth as regards God and our neighbour.

5. *For Christ our Pasch is sacrificed*. According to St Augustine, the word ‘Pasch’ is derived, not from ‘Passion’, but from ‘passing’[3] ; for on that day the destroying angel passed through Egypt, as the Lord set his people free. By the word ‘Pasch’ they signified the Lamb who was to pass this day from this world to the Father. So, we note, ‘Pasch’ denotes both the lamb and the evening hour in which the lamb was slain, the fourteenth moon of the first month. It refers also to the days of unleavened bread, from the fifteenth evening to the twenty-first day of the same month. The Evangelists, however, use the term ‘days of unleavened bread’ and ‘Pasch’ interchangeably. For example, Luke says: *The feast of unleavened bread, which is called the pasch, was at hand* [Lk 22.1]. So: *Christ our Pasch is sacrificed*. On this Paschal solemnity, we eat this Lamb, nailed for us to the Cross, sacrificed to God the Father for the reconciliation of the human race, with the bitter herbs which are sorrow of heart, in the way commanded to the children of Israel.

*You shall gird your reins* (says the Lord), *and you shall have shoes on your feet, holding staves in your hands, and you shall eat in haste; for it is the Phase (that is the Passage) of the Lord*. [Ex 12.11]

Note these three words: reins, shoes and staves. The ‘reins’ or kidneys are the parts from which flow the foul liquids of the body. The veins and interior parts distil a thin fluid in the kidneys, and this fluid when released from there runs down with sexual heat. The kidneys are by nature hot, and they are composed of much fat. That is why the Lord says, rightly, *Gird your reins*. In other words, restrain the heat of lust by the mortification of the flesh. The ‘shoes’ are the examples of the saints. With these we should protect our feet, the affections of our minds, so that we may safely tread upon serpents (the suggestions of the devil) and scorpions (the false promises of the world). The ‘staves’ in our hands are the words of preaching, shown in our deeds. He who wishes to eat the Lord’s Body worthily should gird his reins with the cord of chastity, protect the affections of his mind with the examples of the saints, and prove his words by his works. So, with the true Israelites, he will celebrate the true Pasch and *pass from this world to the Father* [cf. Jn 13.11]. Of this passing, a certain philosopher has said:

"The world is like a bridge: cross it, don’t make your home on it."

And another has said:

"The world is an unstable bridge.

You get on to it via your mother’s womb, you leave it via death."[4]

So it is good to build a tower of humility with Mary Magdalen, and to uproot the world

with Mary of James.

**(A sermon on peace: *With three things my spirit is pleased*, and on the nature of bees.)**

6. With these two there is associated a third, Salome, whose name means ‘joyful peace’. Ecclesiasticus says of this:

*With three things my spirit is pleased, which are approved before God and men:*

*The concord of brethren, and the love of neighbours,*

*and man and wife that agree well together*. [Ecclus 25.1-2]

From this three-fold peace there arises joy before God and his angels, and rejoicing among men. As the Prophet says, *Behold how good and how pleasant it is*, etc. [Ps 132.1].

Let us say, then: *Mary Magdalen, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought sweet spices, that coming, they might anoint Jesus*. Luke says that:

*The women that were come with him from Galilee... saw the sepulchre and how his body was laid. And returning they prepared spices and ointments; and on the sabbath day they rested, according to the commandment*. [Lk 23.55-56]

The Gloss on Matthew says that the commandment was to observe the sabbath rest from evening to evening; and so the religious women, after the Lord’s burial, occupied themselves in preparing ointments as long as it was lawful to work- that is, until sunset on Good Friday. And because, due to lack of time, they could not complete their task, as soon as the sabbath was over (that is, after sunset) and it was possible to work again, they hastened to buy spices, so that in the morning they might come and anoint the body of Jesus. These devout women hastened. They worked to prepare ointments, like bees working to make wax and honey. Regarding this, it says in the ‘Natural History’[5] that "The works of bees are shared out. Some make wax, some honey; some shape the wax, some bring water, some gather the honey. Some go to work at the beginning of the day, and some rest until they are aroused by one of their number. Then they fly and go to work." The bee which wakens the other, sleeping, bees I reckon to be the blessed Magdalen, who because she loved much, strongly urged the others to prepare ointments. But blessed Mary, after the Lord her Son had been buried, never departed (some say) from the tomb, but continually kept watch there, weeping, until she was the first to be found worthy to see him risen; and so in her honour Saturday is celebrated by the faithful.

**(A sermon for religious: *Take to yourself perfumes*.)**

7. In the same way, faithful souls enlightened with the splendour of humility will buy with good will (the coin stamped with the Emperor's image [cf. Mt 22.19-21]) the spices of which the Lord spoke to Moses in Exodus, saying:

*Take spices, of principal and chosen myrrh, and of cinnamon, of calamus, of cassia, and of olive oil. And thou shalt make the holy oil of unction, an ointment compounded after the art of the perfumer: and therewith thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the testimony, and the ark of the testament, and the table with the vessels thereof, the candlestick and furnture thereof, the altars of incense and of holocaust*. [Ex 30.23-28]

Principal and chosen myrrh represents devotion of the mind, which we should choose for ourselves as first priority. Cinnamon, the colour of ash, stands for the remembrance of death. Calamus (reed-pipe) is the melody of confession. Cassia, whose habitat is watery places, and which grows tall, is faith: which is nurtured in the waters of Baptism and grows tall by charity. Olive oil is heart-felt mercy. From these five we should make the holy ointment which sanctifies us, compounded after the art of the perfumer, the Holy Spirit.

With this ointment we should anoint these five things:

The tabernacle of the testimony: that is, the poor of Jesus Christ, signed with the character of his poverty while they are in this world, on pilgrimage far from the Lord.

The ark of the testament: those who carry the ark of obedience in a new vessel, that is, in a heart and body renewed through penitence.

The table with its vessels: those who set before all men the twelve loaves (the doctrine of the Apostles), with a pinch of incense (the humility of a devout mind) and a gold dish (the brightness of fraternal charity).

The candlestick and its furniture: all those holy prelates of the Church who do not hide the candle of their dignity under the bushel of temporal wealth, but set it on the hilltop, the excellence of a holy life, so as to give light to all who are in the house, the Church, and to show them the way. And not just the 'candlestick', but its 'furniture': all those others appointed to lesser office.

The altars of holocaust and incense: The altar of holocaust represents those in the active life, who offer themselves wholly for the needs of their neighbour. The altar of incense represents contemplatives, who are experienced in the sweetness of heavenly delights.

With such an ointment, compounded by the Holy Spirit, all those we have spoken of, the members of Jesus Christ, crucified on the cross of penance, dead to the world and buried in the tomb of heavenly converse, away from the disturbance of men- all those should be anointed.

**(A moral sermon on tranquillity of heart: *And very early*.)**

8. Let us say, then:

*Mary Magdalen, and Mary of James, and Salome bought sweet spices, that coming they might anoint Jesus. And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came to the sepulchre, the sun being now risen*. [Mk 16.1-2]

Matthew tells it like this:

*And in the evening of the sabbath, when it began to dawn towards the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalen and the other Mary, to see the sepulchre*. [Mt 28.1]

Luke says:

*And on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared*. [Lk 24.1]

John says:

*And on the first day of the week Mary Magdalen cometh early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre*. [Jn 20.1]

Mark says: ‘very early’, which is not in disagreement with Luke and John. Matthew uses the term ‘evening’, the first part of the night, to refer to the whole night, at the end of which they came to the sepulchre. We should understand ‘the evening, or night, which dawns (that is, which ends with dawn)’; not the first part of the night, but the last, is the dawn at which they came. ‘The evening of the sabbath’ is really the night of the day after the sabbath. They did indeed begin to come in the evening, when they prepared the spices; but they arrived when dawn was breaking. Matthew makes it sound obscure, through trying to be brief, but the others are clear enough.

Morally. And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, etc. ‘Early’ means the dawn of grace, until which the soul is benighted. As the Prophet says:

*In the morning I will stand before thee*. [Ps 5.5]

As St Augustine[6] says, "Right and upright, just as you made me right and upright." On the first day after the sabbath, holy souls come to the tomb. It clearly says that they come on the first day after the sabbath, because unless the spirit rests from temporal things it cannot approach God. So the Lord says in Jeremiah:

*Take heed to your souls and carry no burdens on the sabbath day:*

*and bring them not in by the gates of Jerusalem*. [Jer 17.21]

The sabbath means rest, Jerusalem is the soul, and its gates are the five senses of the body. Those who carry burdens on the sabbath and bring them in by the gates of Jerusalem are those who are entangled in the restlessness of temporal matters, and bring the burdens of sin, the bundles of worldly cares, through the gates of the five senses into the soul. In this way they do not guard it from sin. But faithful souls, who have driven away all the buzzing flies of Egypt, come to the tomb on the first day after the sabbath.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A sermon for those wishing to enter religious life: *Who will roll away for us*.)**

9. There follows, secondly:

*And they said one to another: Who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And looking, they saw the stone rolled back. For it was very great*. [Mk 16.3-4]

Allegorically. The rolling away of the stone suggests the unlocking of the sacraments of Christ, which were covered by the veil of the written law. The Law was written on stone, and when its covering was taken away the glory of the Resurrection was revealed; while the abolition of the ancient death, and the perpetual life we may hope for, began to be preached through the whole earth.

Morally. The stone is rolled away when the weight of sin is taken away by grace. When this happens, and how man should dispose himself in order that it happen in him, is told in Genesis:

*And the custom was, when all the sheep were gathered together, to roll away the stone from the mouth of the well*. [Gen 29.3]

If you want the stone of sin, which presses down upon you so that you cannot rise, to be rolled away: you must gather the sheep (innocent thoughts) in Christ. So there is added:

*And behold, Rachel came with her father's sheep: for she fed the flock*. [Gen 29.9]

Rachel (meaning 'sheep') feeds the sheep, because the simple man nurtures wholesome thoughts.

A further moral interpretation: the man who goes to the tomb is one who proposes to do penance in some monastery or religious order. But when he considers the greatness of the stone (the severity of religious life), he says: *Who shall roll us back the stone from*

*the door of the sepulchre?* The stone is great: what with the difficulty of entering, staying up for vigils, frequent fasting, scarcity of food, rough clothing, hard discipline, voluntary poverty, prompt obedience. Who will roll this stone away for us, from the door of the tomb? O feeble minds! Draw near and look! Do not hesitate, and you will seen the stone already rolled away. Matthew says:

*An angel of the Lord descended from heaven and coming rolled back the stone and sat upon it*. [Mt 28.2]

The angel is the grace of the Holy Spirit, who removes the stone from the door of the sepulchre, strengthens our faith, smoothes out all the roughness, and sweetens all bitterness with the balm of his love. As the Prophet says:

*The horse is prepared for battle: but the Lord giveth safety*. [Prov 21.31]

The 'horse' is good will. "Nothing is hard for one who loves."[7]

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A sermon for contemplatives: *And entering in*.)**

10. There follows, thirdly:

*And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed with a white robe: and they were astonished*. [Mk 16.5]

Morally. The tomb is the contemplative life, in which the man who is dead to the world is buried as in a tomb. So Job says:

*Thou shalt enter into the grave in abundance,*

*as a heap of wheat is brought in its season*. [Job 5.26]

The just man, when the chaff of temporal things has been blown away, leaves the world in the abundance of divine grace and enters the grave of the contemplative life. In this he rests like a heap of corn, because in contemplation his soul is fed with heavenly sweetness. Entering the tomb, he sees a young man sitting on the right, clad in a white robe. The Son of God, 'youthful, because useful', helps us in the vigour of his youth, and is always ready to help. It is appropriate that 'he sat on the right', because the right hand is the 'off side' or 'outside'. He helps us indeed, giving us his divinity and accepting our humanity, so that we who were 'outside' might be brought 'inside'. So that we might enter, he went out and clad himself in a white robe, flesh without the least stain. St

Bernard[8] says: "After all other benefits, he wished his right side to be pierced, to show that he wants to prepare from his right side a place on his right."

The just man, leaving the world and entering the tomb, must see and contemplate this young man, in the way St Bernard[9] indicates: "The person beginning the spiritual life, the novice in Christ, must be taught to draw near to God, so that God may draw near to him. He should be advised with what great purity of heart he must gaze on him, to whom he offers the sacrifice of his prayer. The more he sees and understands him, to whom he makes his offering, the more affection he will have towards him, and love itself will bring understanding. The more he himself has affection towards God, the more he will grasp that this itself, if it is worthy of God, is what he is offering; and in God it will be well with him. To the person praying or meditating in this way, however, we would propose as a better and safer way the image of the Lord's humanity: his birth, Passion and Resurrection. In this way the weaker spirit, which knows best how to think about bodies and bodily things, will have something towards which it may direct its affection, and towards which it may fix a devout gaze, in its own way. Moreover, the Lord comes in the form of a Mediator, as Job says*: A man visiting his own species will not sin* [cf. Job 5.24]. That is to say, when he directs his mental gaze towards him, by thinking of the human nature in God, he never departs from what is true; and as long as in faith he does not make a separation between God and man, he learns for that time how to recognise God in man. In this respect, for the poor in spirit and the simpler children of God there is a sweeter affection in the mind, proportionate to the nearness of human nature. But afterwards, when faith turns into affection, those who embrace Christ Jesus in the midst of their hearts with the embrace of sweet love, begin to know him as fully man, in respect of the human nature he took on, and fully God, in respect of the divine nature which took it; and to know this not according to the flesh, even though they cannot know him fully as God according to his divinity. And so, sanctifying him in their hearts, they love to offer him their vows." They offer their spices with the holy women, of whom it is said: *And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right*, etc.

[FOURTH CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the ten appearances of our Lord and their meaning: *Ye seek Jesus*.)**

11. There follows, fourthly,

*Who saith to them: Be not affrighted; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified: he is risen, he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee; there you shall see him, as he told you*. [Mk 16.6-7]

The bitter root of the Cross has passed away, the flower of life has blossomed with its fruits. That is to say, he who lay down in death has arisen in glory. He was buried at evening, he arose at dawn, so that the words might be fulfilled:

*In the evening weeping shall have place: and in the morning gladness*. [Ps 29.6]

Buried on the sixth day after the sabbath, which is called the Parasceve, around sunset; laid in the tomb during the following night, the sabbath day, and the night following that; he arose on the third day, that is, the morning of the first day after the sabbath. It was appropriate that he lay in the tomb for one day and two nights, because he joined the light of his simple death to the darkness of our twofold death. We were held in the death of both our animal and our spiritual life; he brought his single death, of the flesh, to us and released both of ours. He brought together his simple death and our double death, and in dying he took away our double death.

Note that: "The Lord is recounted to have appeared ten times to his disciples after the Resurrection: first, to Mary Magdalen; second, to the women returning from the tomb; third, to Peter (according to the words: *The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon* [Lk 24.34]); fourth, to the two who were going to Emmaus; fifth, to the ten Apostles behind closed doors, Thomas being absent; sixth, on the eighth day, when he appeared to the Apostles and Thomas was with them; eighth, on Mount Thabor, where the Lord had appointed that they should meet (and so, before the day of Ascension he appeared eight times). On the actual Ascension Day he appeared twice, namely when he ate with the eleven in the upper room, as Luke says: *And eating together with them, he commanded that they should not depart from Jerusalem* [Ac 1.4], and again after the meal. The eleven disciples and others, with the blessed Virgin and the other women, came to the Mount of Olives, where the Lord appeared to them: *And while they looked on, he was raised up; and a cloud received him out of their sight* [Ac 1.9]."[10] Let us see what these ten appearances signify morally.

12. First he appeared to Mary Magdalen. To the penitent soul, the grace of the Lord appears sooner than to others. So it says in Exodus:

*The manna appeared in the wilderness, small, and as it were beaten with a pestle, like unto the hoar frost on the ground*. [Ex 16.14]

‘In the wilderness’, that is, in the penitent, there appears the ‘manna’ of divine grace, ‘small’ in contrition, ‘beaten with a pestle’ in confession, ‘like hoarfrost’ in satisfaction.

Secondly, he appeared to the women returning from the tomb. The Lord appears to those who return from the tomb, who go back from meditation on the wretchedness of his leaving this world in death to the consideration of the woeful way he entered it at his birth. As Genesis says:

*The Lord appeared to Abraham in the vale of Mambre as he was sitting in the door of his tent, in the very heat of the day*. [Gen 18.1]

Abraham is the just man, the valley is two-fold humility, Mambre is ‘clear-seeing’. The tent is the body, its door is the entrance and exit of life, and the heat of the day is

compunction of soul. The Lord appears to the just man who lives in that humility of heart and body which leads to the clear vision of heavenly glory; he sits in the door of his tent, that is, in the consideration of the birth and death of his body, in the fervour of compunction.

Thirdly, he appeared to Peter. As Jeremiah says:

*The Lord hath appeared to me. Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee. And I will build thee again*. [Jer 31.3-4]

Peter says, "The Lord, rising from the dead, appeared to me, to penitent me, to me bitterly weeping!" And the Lord replied, *I have loved thee with an everlasting love*. So it is written, *The Lord turned and looked at Peter* [Lk 22.61]. He looked upon him because he loved him: *Therefore, with the cord of love, I have drawn thee, having pity*. St Augustine[11] says: "He does not want to bring vengeance on sinners, he seeks to bestow pardon on those who confess." I will build thee again, in the summit of the apostleship; so: *Go tell his disciples, and Peter*. St Gregory[12] says: "Peter is mentioned by name, lest he despair because of his denial. If the angel had not mentioned him by name, who had denied his master, he might not have dared to come back among the disciples."

Fourthly, he appeared to the two disciples going to Emmaus. Emmaus means ‘desire of counsel’, namely, of that counsel which the Lord gave when he said:

*If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give to the poor.* [Mt 19.21]

The two disciples stand for the two precepts of charity, towards God and towards our neighbour. The Lord appears to anyone who has charity, and to anyone who desires the poverty of Jesus Christ. So it says in Genesis:

*Isaac went up to Bersabee, where the Lord appeared to him*. [Gen 26.23-24]

Bersabee means ‘the well that satisfies’. This is charity and humility, which satisfy the soul. Those who have this will not thirst for ever [cf. Jn 4.13].

Fifthly, he appeared to ten disciples gathered together in unity, behind closed doors. When the disciples, that is, the affections of reason, are gathered together in unity, and when the doors of the five senses are closed, then truly the grace of the Holy Spirit appears to the mind. So in Luke, when Zacharias had entered the Temple of the Lord, the angel of the Lord appeared to him standing on the right of the altar of incense [cf. Lk 1.9,11]. When Zacharias (‘remembrance of the Lord’), the just man who keeps the Lord in the storehouse of his memory, enters the temple of the Lord (that is, his conscience, in which the Lord dwells) the angel of the Lord (the grace of the Holy Spirit) appears to him, enlightening him, standing at the right of the altar of incense. The altar of incense is compunction of the mind, the right side is a pure intention. Thus the grace of the Lord stands on the right of the altar of incense, because it approves that compunction, praises

that incense and receives it, which the just man sends forth from the pure intention of his mind.

**(A sermon on the general resurrection and the four gifts of the glorified body, which are represented by the four rivers of paradise: *The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun*.)**

13. Sixthly, he appeared on the eighth day to the disciples when Thomas was with them, from whose heart he removed all doubt. When we come to the eighth day of the general resurrection, he will take away every wrinkle of doubt and every spot of mortality and infirmity. As Isaiah says:

*The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun,*

*and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days:*

*in the day when the Lord shall bind up the wound of his people,*

*and shall heal the stripes of their wound*. [Is 30.26]

Notice the two words, wound and stripes. The ‘wound’ refers to the unclean thoughts of the mind, the "stripes" to the death of the body. But in the day of the general resurrection, as Isidore says in the Book of Creatures[13] , "The sun and moon will receive the reward of their labour, because the sun in the east will shine seven times brighter than now, when it shines at the height of noon; so that it will torment those who are in hell. And the moon will stand in the west and will shine as brightly as the sun does now." Then indeed the Lord will truly bind up the wound of our soul, because, as the Prophet says, *no beast* (that is, no evil thought) *will pass through Jerusalem* [cf. Is 35.9]. Further, as John says in the Apocalypse, *The city will be of pure gold like to clear glass* [Apoc 21.18]. What is brighter than gold, or clearer than glass? And what, I ask, will be brighter and clearer than the soul of the glorified man in the general resurrection? Then the Lord will heal the stripes of our wound, with which we were smitten because of the disobedience of our first parents, when *this mortal puts on immortality, and this corruptible puts on incorruption* [cf. 1Cor 15.53-54].

In the general resurrection, the paradise of the Lord (the glory of our glorified body) will be watered by four rivers- Phison, Gehon, Tigris and Euphrates [cf. Gen 2.10-14]. In other words, it will be adorned with four gifts: brightness, subtlety, agility and immortality. Phison means ‘change of countenance’, Gehon ‘the heart’, Tigris ‘an arrow’, Euphrates ‘fruit-bearing’. By Phison, the brightness of the resurrection is designated, whereby we shall be changed from our condition of such dirt and darkness to the likeness of the sun. So it is said: *The just shall shine out like the sun* [Mt 13.43]. Gehon denotes subtlety; for just as a man’s breast is not split, wounded, opened, nor does it suffer pain, when thoughts go forth from his heart: so the glorified body will be of such subtlety that nothing will be impenetrable to it, yet it will remain unbreakable, indissoluble, closed and solid. It

will be like the body of Christ which is already glorified, which went into the apostles, *the doors being shut* [cf. Jn 20.26]. Tigris stands for agility, well represented by the swiftness of the arrow. Euphrates is immortality, wherein we shall be *inebriated by the richness of the house of God* [cf. Ps 35.9]. When we are planted in it, like the tree of life in the midst of paradise, we shall bring forth fruit, the apples of eternal satisfaction. Satisfied with these, we shall not hunger for all eternity.

**(A sermon for the preacher or prelate of the Church: *Take a rod*.)**

14. Seventhly, he appeared to seven disciples as they were fishing. Fishing is preaching, and the Lord appears to those who are labouring at it. So it says in the Book of Numbers:

*The glory of the Lord appeared over Moses and Aaron. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Take the rod, and assemble the people together, thou and Aaron thy brother: and speak to the rock before them, and it shall yield waters. And when thou hast brought forth water out of the rock, all the multitude and their cattle shall drink*. [Num 20.6-8]

In this passage Moses represents the preacher. Aaron means ‘strong mountain’, and he represents two things: excellence of life and constancy of fortitude. Without such a brother Moses could never proceed. To Moses the Lord said: Take the rod of preaching, and gather the people, with Aaron your brother, without whom the people can never be gathered together properly. "He whose life is despised, his preaching will be held in contempt."[14] Speak to the rock, the hard heart of the sinner, and it shall yield the water of compunction. It says, ‘speak ye’, not ‘speak thou’; rightly, because if the preacher alone speaks, and his life is silent, the water will not flow from the rock. The Lord cursed the fig-tree in which no fruit was found, but leaves only [cf. Mt 21.19]. Such were the clothes of those exiled from paradise. Let Moses speak together with Aaron, and the water will flow forth, and the multitude of the people and their cattle- that is, clergy and laity, spiritual and unspiritual, will be filled with the water of compunction. This is the multitude of which John spoke:

*They cast the net; and now they were not able to draw it, for the multitude of fishes*. [Jn 21.6]

**(A sermon for penitents: *With curtains of goats hair*; and: *The Lord Almighty appeared to me at Luza*.)**

15. Eighthly, he appeared to the eleven disciples on a mount in Galilee [cf. Mt 28.16-18]. Galilee means ‘passing across’, and it stands for penitence, whereby a man crosses from the bank of mortal sin, by the bridge of confession, to the bank of satisfaction. So on the mountain of Galilee, the excellence of penance, the Lord appears to the eleven disciples, that is, to penitents. The number eleven is appropriate, because, as Exodus says:

*There were eleven curtains of goats’ hair, to cover the top of the tabernacle*. [Ex 26.7]

There are two things to note in the curtains of goats' hair: the harshness of penance and the stench of sin, to which penitents confess they have been subject. The top of the tabernacle is covered with these curtains, meaning the Church Militant. They withstand the heat of the sun, bearing the burden of the day and its heat [cf. Mt 20.12]. They protect the hangings, woven of fine linen, blue and purple and scarlet double-dyed. This refers to the faithful of the Church, adorned with the fine linen of chastity, the blue of contemplation,the purple of the Lord's Passion and the double-dyed scarlet of twofold charity. They give protection against the downpouring of the rain (the snares of heretics), the whirlwind (the devil's temptation) and the dust that soils (the vanity of the world). Thus, the Lord appeared to the eleven disciples.

In Genesis, Jacob says:

*God Almighty appeared to me at Luza, which is in the land of Chanaan*. [Gen 48.3]

Luza means 'almond', and it stands for penance, which contains three elements, like an almond. There is the bitter skin, the hard shell and the sweet kernel. The bitter skin stands for the bitterness of penitence, the hard shell for the constancy of perseverance, and the sweet kernel for the hope of pardon. The Lord appeared at Luza, which is in the land of Chanaan (meaning 'exchange'). True penance is that which changes a man over from left to right, passing with the eleven disciples on the mountain of Galilee, where the Lord appeared.

Ninthly, he appeared to them while they were at table, as Mark tells [cf. Mk 16.14], on the actual day of the Ascension. Luke says, *While eating with them, he commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem* [Ac 1.4]. The Lord appears to those who sit down (that is, who rest) in the upper room of their mind, away from the unrest of worldly matters, and who eat the bread of tears in the remembrance of their sins and the repast of heavenly sweetness. So Genesis says:

*The Lord appeared to Isaac and said: Go not down into Egypt, but stay in the land that I shall tell thee, and sojourn in it. And I will be with thee, and will bless thee*. [Gen 26.2-3]

The Lord commands the just man three things: not to go down into Egypt, the unrest of worldly matters where bricks are made from the mud of self indulgence, the water of avarice and the straw of pride; to rest in the country of the inward life; and to count himself a pilgrim all the days of his life, in which he now fulfils his service. Thus shall the Lord be with him, and bless him with all the blessings of his right hand.

**(A sermon on compassion for the poor: *The Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire*.)**

16. Tenthly, he appeared to them when, as Luke says,

*He led them out as far as Bethania* (that is, to the Mount of Olives),

*and lifting up his hands he blessed them*; [Lk 24.50]

*and while they looked on, he was raised up;*

*and a cloud received him out of their sight*. [Ac 1.9]

The Lord appears to those who stand upon the Mount of Olives ('mercy'), as Exodus tells:

*The Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush:*

*and he saw that the bush was on fire and was not burnt*. [Ex 3.2]

The Lord appeared to Moses, the merciful man, in a flame of fire; that is, in compassion of mind. But where does this flame come from? It comes from the midst of the bush: of the poor, the pierced, the troubled, the bereft, the naked, the afflicted. When the just man is pricked with the thorns of their poverty, he is set ablaze with compassion to have mercy on them. He sees that the bush, the poor man, burns with greater devotion, and is not consumed by his poverty.

Ah, dearest brothers, gathered together for this Pasch of the Resurrection, I beseech you to buy, with the holy women, the spices of virtue with the coin of good will. With them anoint the limbs of Christ, with sweetness of speech and the fragrance of good example. So may you come to the remembrance of your own death, and enter the tomb of heavenly contemplation. There may you see the Angel of great counsel, the Son of God, sitting at the right hand of God the Father. In the general resurrection, when he comes to judge the world by fire, he will appear to you gloriously: I do not say ten times only, but always, into eternity and world without end. You will see him as he is, you will rejoice with him, you will reign with him. May he who rose from the dead deign to grant us this. To him be honour and glory, empire and power, in heaven and on earth, in eternity and through everlasting ages. Let every faithful soul, in this Easter joy, say: Amen. Alleluia!

NOTES

[1] CATO, *Disticha* II,17,2

[2] ADAM OF ST VICTOR, *Sequentia* V, PL 196.1437-8

[3] See *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Lk 22.1, from which this whole paragraph is taken.

[4] The source of these sayings is untraced.

[5] cf. ARISTOTLE, *De historia animalium* IX,40,627a20-25; PLINY, *Natural History* XI,10

[6] cf. AUGUSTINE, *De Genesi ad litteram*, VI,12,22; PL 34.348

[7] CICERO, *Orator*, 10,33

[8] BERNARD, *In psalmum "Qui habitat" sermo* 7,15; PL 183.208

[9] GUIGO, *Ad fratres de Monte Dei*, I,14,42-43; PL 184.335-6

[10] P. COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, Actus Apostolorum*, cc 1,3,4; PL 198.1645-7

[11] AUGUSTINE, *Enarratio in ps*. 49.6; PL 36.568

[12] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Mk 16.7

[13] cf. ISIDORE, *De ordine creaturarum liber*, 5,5; PL 83.924

[14] GREGORY, *In Evangelia homilia* 12,1; PL 76.1119

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## EASTER OCTAVE

**(The Gospel for the Easter Octave: *When it was late that same day*; which is divided into five clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for the preacher, and those to whom he should preach*: I was in the city of Joppa*.)**

1. At that time: *When it was late that same day, the first of the week, and the doors were shut, where the disciples were gathered together, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst and said to them: Peace be to you*. [Jn 20.19]

In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter says:

*I was in the city of Joppa, praying; and I saw in an ecstasy of mind a vision, a certain vessel descending, as it were a great sheet let down from heaven by four corners. And it came even unto me. Into which looking, I considered, and saw four-footed creatures of the earth and beasts and creeping things and fowls of the air, and I heard also a voice saying to me: Arise, Peter, kill and eat*. [Acts 11.5-7]

Peter represents the preacher, who ought to be praying *in the city of Joppa* ('beauty'), in the unity of the Church wherein is the beauty of virtue, and outside which is the leprosy of faithlessness. This, then, is what the preacher should do first: devote himself to prayer. Then follows the *ecstasy of mind*, the raising up from earthly things, in which he sees *a certain vessel, as it were a sheet*. The vessel and the great sheet stand for the grace of preaching- a vessel that inebriates the minds of the faithful with the wine of compunction, a great sheet which wipes away the sweat of his labour and refreshes him to bear suffering. Its *four corners* are the teachings of the four Evangelists. It is *let down from heaven* because *Every best gift and every perfect gift is from above* [cf. Jas 1.17]. *And it came even unto me*. Here is expressed more especially the privilege of the preacher, to whom the vessel of preaching is especially sent from heaven. In this vessel are *four-footed creatures of the earth*, the greedy and lustful; *beasts* that ravage, traitors and murderers; *creeping things*, the avaricious and usurers; and *fowls of the air*, the proud who are lifted up on the wings of vainglory. This vessel is the net cast in the sea, catching every kind of fish [cf. Mt 13.47], and the preacher is bidden*: Rise, kill and eat*. Rise to evangelize; kill what is worldly, mortifying and slaying to make a sacrifice to God,

whereby they may be taken from the old and may pass to newness; and eat, receive them into the unity and the congregation of the body of the Church. It is this unity and this congregation which is spoken of in today's Gospel: *When it was late that same day, the first of the week*.

2. There are five things to note well in this Gospel. First, the gathering of the disciples, where it begins: *When it was late*, etc. Second, the greeting of three-fold peace, when it goes on: *Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them: Peace to you*. Third, the power given to the Apostles of binding and loosing: *And when he had said this, he breathed on them*, etc. Fourth, Thomas's doubt: *Thomas, one of the twelve*, etc. Fifth, Thomas's confession, and the confirmation of our faith: *And after eight days*.

Note that this Sunday the Epistle of blessed John is read*: Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world*. And during the night is read, according to the usage of the Roman Church, the Acts of the Apostles. We will touch briefly on five stories from it, and **concord** them with the aforesaid five clauses of the Gospel. The first is the gathering of the Apostles in Jerusalem: *Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount that is called Olivet*. The second: *In those days, Peter, rising up in the midst of the brethren*, etc. Third, the man lame from his mother's womb, to whom Peter said: *Silver and gold I have none*, etc. Fourth, the conversion of Saul. Fifth, the eunuch, and the centurion Cornelius.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon against the prosperity of the world: *I have not desired the day of man*.)**

3. Let us say, then: *When it was late that same day*, etc.

There are five things to note in this first clause: 'late', 'that same day', 'the first of the week', 'the doors being shut', and 'the disciples being gathered, for fear of the Jews'.

The word 'day' is connected, etymologically, with a word for 'brightness', and it stands for the glare of worldly vanity, of which the Lord says in John:

*I receive not glory from men*. [Jn 5.41]

Jeremiah says:

*I have not desired the day of man, thou knowest*. [Jer 17.16]

and Luke says:

*And now in this thy day* (not mine), *the things that are to thy peace* (not mine). [Lk 19.42]

In the Acts of the Apostles we read:

*And in the next day, when Agrippa and Berenice were come in with great pomp*, [Ac 25.23]

that is, with a great crowd accompanying them. According to the Gloss, the Greek *phantasia* means ‘an empty show’; Agrippa is ‘sudden gathering’, and Bernice is ‘daughter elegantly moved’. Agrippa represents the worldly rich man, who grabs together riches along with usury and lying. Nevertheless,

*the riches which he hath swallowed he shall vomit up:*

*and God shall draw them out of his belly*. [Job 20.15]

Berenice is the lust of the flesh, the daughter of the devil, who is moved by outward elegance, and moves others by it. Agrippa and Berenice, the rich and the pleasure-seeking, go forth in the day of their worldly glory with great pomp, the empty show that deludes them; for they think important what is just nothing, and even as they grasp it, it falls away.

*When it was late, that same day*. The evening of that day is penitence, wherein the sun of worldly glory is turned to darkness, and the moon of carnal desire is turned into blood. So Peter says, in the Acts of the Apostles, using the words of the Lord in Joel:

*I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath;*

*blood and fire and vapour of smoke*.

*The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood*. [Ac 2.19-20; Joel 2.30-31]

Allegorically. The Lord gave signs in heaven and on earth when he came down to earth in the blood of the Cross; and in fire, when he sent the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, thus sending up the smoke of compunction:

*They had compunction in their hearts, and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles: What shall we do, men and brethren? But Peter said to them: Do penance, and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ*. [Ac 2.37-38]

Morally. Blood stands for the mortification of the flesh, fire for the ardour of charity, and the vapour of smoke for compunction of heart. The Lord gives these signs ‘in heaven’ (that is, in the just), and ‘on earth’ (in sinners).

**(A sermon for converted sinners: *When it was late that same day*; and: *All Mount Sinai was on a smoke*.)**

4. There is a **concordance** to these three in today's Epistle:

*There are three that give testimony on earth: the spirit, the water and the blood*. [1Jn 5.8]

Allegorically: The spirit refers to the human life which Jesus Christ gave up in his Passion. Water and blood flowed from his side, which could only happen because he had the true nature of flesh.

Morally. The spirit is charity, the water is compunction, the blood is the mortification of the flesh. There is a **concordance** to this in Exodus:

*And all mount Sinai was on a smoke: because the Lord was come down upon it in fire, and the smoke arose from it as out of a furnace. And all the mount was terrible. And the sound of the trumpet grew by degrees louder and louder, and was drawn out at greater length*. [Ex 19.18-19]

Mount Sinai is the mind of the penitent. When the Lord comes down on it in the fire of charity (as he says: *I have come to cast fire on the earth* [Lk 12.49]), the whole mountain smokes, and the smoke of compunction goes up from it as from a furnace, the ardour of the mind. So all the mountain is 'terrible' by the mortification of the flesh, and 'terrible' to the unclean spirits. So Job says:

*No man spoke to him a word. For they saw that his grief was very great*. [Job 2.13]

*And the sound of the trumpet*, that is, confession, *grew by degrees louder and louder, and was drawn out at greater length*; because the penitent when he confesses must start with sinful thoughts, and go on with words and deeds.

There follows: *The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood*. The sun is turned into darkness when worldly brightness is darkened with the sackcloth of penitence; and the moon is turned to blood when the lust of the flesh is chastised by mortification, vigils and fasting. It is well said: When it was late that same day, the first of the week. The Lord says of it in Exodus: *Remember that thou keep holy the sabbath day* [Ex 20.8].

**(A sermon on the doors, which are the five senses of the body: *And the doors were shut*.)**

5. One keeps holy the sabbath day by remaining in quietness of spirit, and refraining from eveil deeds. *And the doors were shut*. The doors are the five bodily senses, which we should close at the evening of divine love and fear, lest there should happen to us what Paul warns of in the Acts of the Apostles:

*I know that after my departure ravening wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock*. [Ac 20.29]

Paul means ‘humble’. When humility leaves the heart, the ravening wolves of carnal desire enter by the doors of the five senses, to devour the flock of pure thoughts. *Where the disciples were gathered together, for fear of the Jews*. The disciples are the affections of reason. They should be gathered together for fear of *the Jews*, the demons who would harm them. As it says in Canticles:

*Thou art beautiful and comely, daughter of Jerusalem:*

*terrible as an army set in array*. [cf. Cant 6.3]

The daughter of the heavenly Jerusalem is the soul, beautiful by faith and comely by charity. She is terrible to the unclean spirits when the affections of reason and the thoughts of the mind are so ordered, as an army of soldiers is drawn up to fight the enemy.

There is a **concordance** to this gathering in the Acts of the Apostles. Luke says:

*Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount that is called Olivet, which is nigh Jerusalem, within a sabbath day’s journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James of Alphaeus and Simon Zelotes, and Jude the brother of James. All these were persevering with one mind in prayer, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren*. [Ac 1.12-14]

Mount Olivet is situated about a mile from Jerusalem; a sabbath day’s journey, since it was not lawful for Jews to travel more than a mile on the sabbath. The upper room is said to have been on the third floor, representing charity built on faith and hope. We should go up into this upper room and remain their with the Apostles, and persevere in one mind in prayer and contemplation and shedding of tears, that we may deserve to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit. Thus our Lord says in Luke: *Stay you in the city till you be endued with power from on high* [Lk 24.49], that is, the Holy Spirit.

If, then, the day of worldly brightness declines, and the evening of penitence draws on, when man shall rest from worldly desires as on a sabbath, and the doors of the five senses are closed, and all the disciples of Christ (christians, or the affections of the just man) are gathered in one: then the Lord will do what follows.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the three-fold peace, and on charity, and on the nature of elephants: *Jesus came*.)**

6. There follows, secondly:

*Jesus came and stood in the midst and said to them: Peace be to you. And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord. He said therefore to them again: Peace be to you. As the Father hath sent me, I also send you*. [Jn 20.19-21]

Note first that in this Gospel 'Peace be to you' is said three times, because of the three-fold peace which Christ restored: between God and man, reconciling man to God the Father by his own blood; between angels and men, by taking human nature and raising it above the choirs of angels; and between man and man, between the Jewish and Gentile peoples, joining them together in himself, the corner-stone.

Note, too, that in the Latin word PAX (peace) there are three letters and one syllable, a reminder of the Trinity and Unity. P stands for *Pater*, the Father; A is the first vowel, representing the Son, the first utterance of the Father; X is a double consonant, representing the Holy Spirit who proceeds from both. Thus in saying: *Peace be to you*, he commend to us the faith of the Trinity and Unity.

*Jesus came and stood in the midst*. The proper place of Jesus is 'in the midst': in heaven, in the Virgin's womb, in the animals' crib, on the gibbet of the Cross. In heaven, as in the Apocalypse:

*The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne* (the bosom of the Father)

*shall rule them and shall lead them to the fountains of the waters of life*

(the fullness of heavenly glory). [Apoc 7.17]

In the Virgin's womb, as Isaiah says:

*Rejoice and praise, O thou habitation of Sion:*

*for great is he that is in the midst of thee, the Holy One of Israel*. [Is 12.6]

O blessed Mary, habitation of Sion, the Church: in your Son's Incarnation he established you as the dwelling place of faith. Rejoice in your heart and praise with your lips, saying: *My soul doth magnify the Lord* [Lk 1.46]. He who is great, yet small and humble, he who is holy and sanctifies Israel is in your midst, that is, in your womb.

In the animals' crib, as Habbakuk says:

*In the midst of two animals thou shalt be known*. [Hab 3.2 (Septuagint)]

and Isaiah:

*The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib*. [Is 1.3]

On the gibbet of the Cross, as John says:

*They crucified him, and with him two others, one on each side, and Jesus in the midst*. [Jn 19.18]

So, *Jesus came and stood in the midst*. He says in Luke:

*I am in the midst of you, as he that serveth*. [Lk 22.27]

He stands in the midst of every heart. He stands in the midst, so that from him as from a centre all the lines of grace might radiate to us who are at the circumference, surrounding him and moving around him.

7. There is a **concordance** to this in the Acts of the Apostles. Luke says:

*Peter, rising up in the midst of the brethren, said (now the number of persons together was about a hundred and twenty): Men, brethren*, [Ac 1.15-16]

and the rest that follows regarding the election of Mathias. Christ rising from the dead stood in the midst of the disciples, and Peter, who previously fell by denying him, rose in the midst of the brethren. This shows us that when we rise from sin we should stand in the midst of the brethren; because the 'midst' is charity, which extends to friend and foe alike. So *Jesus came and stood in the midst of the disciples, and said to them: Peace be to you*.

Note that peace is threefold: temporal peace, as it is said in the third book of Kings that *Solomon had peace round about* [3(1)Kg 4.24]; peace in the heart, of which is said: *In peace in the self-same I will sleep and I will rest* [Ps 4.9], and also:

*The Church had peace throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria; and was edified, walking in the fear of the Lord; and was filled with the consolation of the Holy Ghost*. [Ac 9.31]

Judea means 'confession', Galilee 'passing through', and Samaria 'guardian'. The Church, the faithful soul, has peace in all three- in confession, in passing from vice to virtue, and in guarding the divine precepts and graces received. in this way it is built up, and walks from strength to strength in the fear of the Lord (a fear which is not servile but filial); and is filled with the consolation of the Holy Spirit in every tribulation. The third peace is that of eternity, of which it is said: *Who hath placed peace in thy borders* [Ps

147.14].

You should have the first peace with your neighbour and the second in yourself. Then you will have the third with God in heaven, in the Octave of the Resurrection. Stand, then, in the midst, and you will have peace with your neighbour. If you do not stand in the midst, you cannot have peace. There is no peace or tranquillity on the circumference, only movement and noise. It is said that when elephants fight, they have no little care for wounds; they keep the weary and the wounded in the middle. That is how you should receive your weary and wounded neighbour, in the midst of charity. That is what the gaoler did, of whom the Acts of the Apostles tells, when

*taking Paul and Silas the same hour of the night, he washed their stripes... and when he had brought them into his own house, he laid the table for them; and rejoiced with all his house, believing God*. [Ac 16.33-34]

8. So, *Jesus stood in the midst of his disciples, and said to them: Peace be to you. And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side*.

Luke's version is: *See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself*. [Lk 24.39]

It seems to me that there are four reasons why the Lord showed the Apostles his hands, side and feet. First, to show that he had truly risen, and to take away from us all doubtfulness. Second, so that the dove (the Church or the faithful soul) might build her nest in his wounds, as in the clefts of the rock, and hide from the eyes of the hawk that schemes to catch her. Third, to print the signs of his Passion as seals upon our hearts. Fourth, to ask us to share his sufferings, and never again to crucify him with the nails of sin. So he shows us his hands and his side, saying: Here are the hands you wounded by fastening them with nails. Here is the side from which you, the faithful, my Church, were born, as Eve was created from the side of Adam. This side was opened by the lance, so that it might open for you the gate of Paradise, closed by the cherubim and the flaming sword. The power of the blood flowing from the side of Christ removed the angel and blunted the sword, while the water quenched the fire. Do not crucify me again. Do not pollute the blood of the covenant in which you have been sanctified. Do not shame the spirit of grace. If you listen and pay careful attention, O man, you will have peace within yourself. And so, after the Lord showed them his hands and his side, he said again: *Peace be to you. As the Father sent me* to sufferings, even though he loved me: *so I send you* to endure evils, with the same love wherewith the Father sent me.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the absolution of God and of the priest, and in what order a person is raised from the death of sin to penitence: *Receive the Holy Spirit*; and: *Silver and gold*.)**

9. There follows, thirdly:

*And when he had said this, he breathed on them; and he said to them: Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them; and whose*, etc.

The breathing signified that the Holy Spirit is not only the Spirit of the Father, but his own also. St Gregory[1] says: "The Spirit is given on earth, so that the neighbour may be loved; given from heaven, so that God may be loved." *Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you forgive*, etc. That is, those whom you judge worthy of forgiveness, using the two keys of power and discretion, that is, the exercise of power and discretion. We are to understand the manner and the order to be observed in the power of binding and loosing. Let us see in what way the priest forgives sin and absolves the sinner.

If someone sins mortally, he immediately makes himself ready for hell, bound with the chain of eternal death. Afterwards he is truly contrite, and being truly sorry he resolves to confess. At once, God absolves him from guilt and eternal death, which by his contrition is changed to the pain of purgatory. His contrition may be so great (as with Magdalen and the thief) that if he were to die he would fly at once to heaven. He approaches the priest, he confesses, and the priest enjoins on him a temporal punishment, whereby purgatory is changed to something temporal, and if he completes it properly he passes to glory. So God and the priest forgive and absolve.

There is a **concordance** to this in the Acts of the Apostles, where Peter says:

*Silver and gold I have none; but what I have, I give thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk. And taking him by the right hand, he lifted him up; and forthwith his feet and soles received strength. And he, leaping up, stood and walked and went in with them into Jerusalem*. [Ac 3.6-8]

St Bernard, writing to Pope Eugenius[2] , says: "Consider what your fathers bequeathed to you. The duly witnessed accounts make no record of anything of these. Listen to the voice of your predecessor, saying: *Silver and gold I have none*." The Gloss says that the first Tabernacle had a right to the fruits of agriculture; it was a secular sanctuary, adorned with silver and gold. But the blood of the Gospel gleams more precious than the metals of the Law. The people that previously lay crippled before the golden pillars enter the heavenly temple in the name of Jesus Christ crucified. St Jerome[3] says: "If you want to bring back gold and silver into the Church, bring back the blood-sacrifices too. It was lawful for the ancient people to have these, because these were promised them. But now the poor Christ has dedicated poverty in his own body, and he promises his people heavenly rewards, not temporal."

*In the name of Jesus Christ*, etc. This is the order of perfection: first he rises from his recumbent state; then he seizes on the path of virtue; and so he enters the gate of the kingdom with the Apostles. Note these words: *Rise*, by contrition; *walk*, by confession; and then, *taking him by the right hand, he lifted him up*, he absolved him and sent him away in peace.

There is another **concordance** to this in the Acts of the Apostles, where it is told that

*Peter found at Lydda a certain man named Aeneas, who had kept his bed for eight years, who was ill of the palsy. And Peter said to him: Aeneas, the Lord Jesus healeth thee; arise and make thy bed. And immediately he arose*. [Ac 9.33-34]

Aeneas (‘poor’ or ‘wretched’) stands for the sinner living in mortal sin, poor and wretched because he is a slave of the devil. He lies like one paralysed on the bed of carnal desire, helpless in all his limbs. To him, the vicar of Peter should say: *Aeneas*, poor and wretched, *Jesus Christ heals you. Rise*. by contrition, *and make your bed* by confession. You, no-one else, must set it in order. *And immediately he arose*, absolved from every bond of sin.

Another **concordance** is:

*Peter said: Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes... And giving her his hand, he lifted her up*. [Ac 9.40-41]

Tabitha means ‘gazelle’, an animal timid and fearful, that flees from the hand; a creature of the woodland. This stands for the soul of the sinner, timid, fearful, fleeing from the hand of the heavenly Father. To her is said: *Rise*, by contrition; and then she opens her eyes by confession, and sits up, humbling herself by satisfaction; and so she is raised by the absolution of all her sins.

[FOURTH CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the Resurrection of the Lord: *In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David*.)**

10. There follows, fourthly:

*Now Thomas, one of the twelve, who is called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him: We have seen the Lord. But he said to them: Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the place of the nails and put my finger into his side, I will not believe*. [Jn 20.24-25]

Thomas means ‘abyss’, because by doubting he came to know more profoundly, and stood more firmly. Didymus is the Greek for ‘twin’- he was in two minds. It was not by chance but by divine dispensation that Thomas was absent and did not believe what he heard. Divine dispensation! Honest doubt of the disciple! *Except I shall see in his hands*, etc. He wished to see rebuilt the tabernacle of David that had fallen (as the Lord says through Amos):

*In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, that is fallen,*

*and I will close up the breaches of the walls thereof*. [Am 9.11]

David ('strong-armed') stands for the divinity, and the tabernacle for the body of Christ, in which his divinity dwelt as in a tabernacle, and which fell by his Passion and death. The breaches of its walls represent the wounds in his hands and feet and side. The Lord rebuilt them in his Resurrection, and it is of these that Thomas said: *Except I shall see in his hands*, etc. The kind Lord would not leave his disciple in doubt, since it was honest doubt, because he was to be a chosen vessel. He mercifully took away all the darkness of his doubt, like the blindness of unbelief in Saul.

So there is a **concordance** in the Acts of the Apostles, where Ananias says:

*Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus hath sent me, he that appeared to thee in the way as thou camest; that thou mayest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it were scales; and he received his sight. And, rising up, he was baptised. And when he had taken meat, he was strengthened*. [Ac 9.17-19]

Isaiah's words about *the wolf with the lamb* [Is 65.25] were fulfilled in Saul and Ananias (whose name means 'sheep'). The body of a snake is covered with scales, and the Jews were called snakes- *a generation of vipers* [Mt 23.33]. Saul followed their unbelief, which covered the eyes of his heart like a snake's skin. But when the scales fell from his eyes by the hand of Ananias, the light he had received in his mind showed in his face also. In the same way, by the hand of 'Ananias' (Jesus Christ, who was led like a sheep to slaughter) there fell from the eyes of Thomas the scales of doubt, and he received the sight of faith.

[FIFTH CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the milk of divine mercy: *Like new-born babes*; and on the chastity of elephants.)**

11. And so there follows, fifthly:

*And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Jesuth cometh, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst and said: Peace be with you*. [Jn 20.26]

This has already been expounded, and I will say no more.

*Then he saith to Thomas: Put in thy finger hither and se my hands; and bring hither thy hand and put it into my side; and be not faithless but believing. Thomas answered and*

*said to him: My Lord and my God. Jesus saith to him: Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen and have believed*. [Jn 20.27-29]

The Lord says in Isaiah: *I have graven thee in my hands* [Is 49.16]. There are three things necessary for writing: paper, ink and pen. Christ's hands were as it were paper, his blood ink, the nails the pen. Christ wrote us upon his hands for three reasons: first, to show the Father the scars of the wounds he bore for us, and so move him to mercy. Second, that he might never forget us, as he says in Isaiah:

*Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb?*

*And if she should forget, yet will I not forget thee.*

*Behold, I have graven thee in my hands*. [Is 49.15-16]

Thirdly, he wrote on his hands how we should live and what we should believe. So be not faithless, O Thomas, O christian, but believing.

*Thomas replied: My Lord and my God*, etc. Jesus did not say: Because you have touched, but: Because you have seen. Sight is as it were sense in general, which is used to refer to the other four. The Gloss says that perhaps Thomas did not dare to touch, but only to look; or maybe it was by touching that he saw. He saw a man and touched him; but he believed in God. All doubt was removed, and he confessed what he did not see. *Thou hast seen me*, Thomas, as man; *thou hast believed* me to be God.

12. *Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed*. Herein he commends the faith of the Gentiles. Although he used the past tense, he was referring to what was to come, regarding it in his foreknowledge as already fact. There is a **concordance** in the Acts of the Apostles, regarding the eunuch of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, whom Philip questioned:

*If thou believest with all thy heart* (thou mayest be baptized). *And he, answering, said:*

*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God... And he baptized him*. [Ac 8.37,38]

Remember also Cornelius the centurion, whom Peter baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, with all his family [cf. Ac 10.1-48]. These two, who believed in Christ, prefigured the Church of the Gentiles which was to be reborn in sacred Baptism, and to believe in the name of Jesus Christ. Peter speaks to them in the Introit of today's Mass, saying:

*As newborn babes, desire the rational milk without guile*. [1Pt 2.2]

An infant is one who has not yet learned to talk (*in-fans*). The faithful of the Church, born of water and the Holy Spirit, should be infants, not speaking the language of Egypt. As

Isaiah says:

*The Lord shall lay waste the tongue of the sea of Egypt*. [Is 11.15]

The tongue represents eloquence, the sea philosophical wisdom, Egypt the world. The Lord lays waste the tongue of the sea of Egypt when, through simple and uneducated men, he shows the eloquence and wisdom of the world to be dumb and foolish.

*Rational, without guile*. Rational is what pertains to reason, and reason is that aspect of the mind whereby we see truth in itself, not as embodied; or it is the very contemplation of truth, not by the body. It is, even, the truth itself which is contemplated. ‘Rational’ relates to God and ourselves; ‘without guile’ to our neighbour.

*Desire the milk*. That is, the milk of which St Augustine[4] says: "The bread of angels has become the milk of little ones." Milk is a liquid white in colour. It is produced naturally from the blood. After birth, the blood which has not been used up as nourishment in the womb passes by a natural process into the breasts, by whose power it becomes white and takes on the quality of milk. So it becomes the food of the new-born, since the matter which brings about generation is the same matter which feeds. Milk is blood that has been refined and purified, not milk that has been corrupted. Blood, horrible to look at, represents God’s wrath; milk, sweet to the taste and pleasant in colour, represents God’s mercy. The blood of wrath was changed into the milk of mercy in the breast (that is, the humanity) of Jesus Christ. So the Prophet says:

*He hath made his lightnings the rain*. [Ps 134.7]

The lightning of divine wrath was changed into the mercy of rain when the Word was made flesh.

13. Morally. The Ethiopian eunuch and the centurion Cornelius both represent converted sinners. Cornelius means ‘understanding circumcision’. Cornelius and the eunuch are appropriately joined together. Penitents make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven [cf. Mt 19.12]. They cut off their carnal desires and, believing in the name of Jesus, wash in the living fountain of compunction, renewing themselves in the baptism of penitence. They behave like elephants, of whom Solinus[5] tells us: "The females do not have sexual relations before they are ten years old, nor the males before they are five. They come together every two years, and for no more than five days in the year; and they do not return to the herd until they wash in running water." In the same way, penitents and just men, if they offend in anything, are ashamed to return to the company of the faithful until they have washed in the running waters of tears and penitence.

Let us pray, then, dearest brethren, and suppliantly beseech the mercy of Jesus Christ: that he may come and stand in our midst, may bestow peace on us, and forgive our sins; that he may take all doubt from our hearts and imprint in our minds faith in his Passion

and Resurrection; so that with the Apostles and faithful of the Church we may be found fit to receive eternal life. May he grant this, who is blessed, to be praised, and glorious for ever and ever. Let every faithful soul say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Jn 20.23

[2] cf. BERNARD, *De consideratione* II,6,9-10; PL 182.747-748

[3] cf JEROME, *Ad Nepotianum, epistola* 52.10; PL 22.535-536

[4] cf. AUGUSTINE, *Enarratio II in Ps* 30.9; PL 36.235

[5] SOLINUS, *Polyhistor*, 38

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

**(The Gospel for the second Sunday after Easter: *I am the good shepherd*; which is divided into four clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for the preacher: *There was given me a reed*; and on the three characteristics of a reed, and their significance.)**

1. At that time: Jesus said to his disciples: *I am the good shepherd*. [Jn 10.11]

John says in the Apocalypse:

*There was given me a reed, like unto a rod*. [Apoc 11.1]

This reed is the preaching of the Gospel. Just as a reed-pen writes letters on parchment, so preaching should inscribe faith and good morals on the heart of the hearer. A reed and a pen are the tools of a scribe, with which he applies ink (the latin *calamus* is related to a nautical term for calling out; and also to the word 'calamity', since unhappiness follows emptiness). Preaching is also like a rod, solid, straight and used for correction. Preaching should be solid, cram-full of goodness. It should put forward truth, not falsehood; and without flippancy, triviality or over-ornateness. It should move to tears, as Solomon says:

*The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails deeply fastened in*. [Eccles 12.11]

Just as a goad pricks and draws blood, and as a nail driven through a hand causes agony, so the words of a wise man should goad the sinner's heart and draw from it the blood of tears (which, as Augustine says[1] , are the life-blood of the soul); and should strike painfully for past sins and for the punishments of hell. Preaching should be straight, and the preacher should not distort by his actions what he says by his words. Speaking loses its authority when preaching is not backed by practice. Preaching should also be corrective, so that those who hear it should thereby amend their lives. It is with a rod like this that the good shepherd (good prelate of the Church or ordinary preacher) will correct and feed his flock of sheep, just as the Good Shepherd corrected and fed his sheep, saying in today's Gospel: *I am the good shepherd*.

2. There are four things to note in this Gospel. First, the devoted care of the good shepherd for his sheep, even giving his life for them if necessary, as it begins: *I am the good shepherd*. Second, the flight of the hireling and the attack of the wolf, as it goes on*: The hireling, and he that is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not*, etc. Third, the mutual knowledge of shepherd and sheep: *I am the good shepherd and I know mine*, etc. Fourth, the gathering of the Catholic Church from the two peoples, Jewish and Gentile: *And other sheep I have, that are not of this fold*, etc.

This Sunday and next the Apocalypse is read. We will divide it into seven parts. The first part treats of the seven churches, the second of the four horses, the third of the sealing of the twelve tribes, and the fourth of the woman robed with the sun. We will **concord** these four parts with the four parts of this Gospel. The fifth part of the Apocalypse treats of the seven angels having vials full of the wrath of God, the sixth of the damnation of the great Whore (worldly vanity), and the seventh of the river of living water, the everlastingness of eternal life. God willing, we will **concord** these three parts with the three parts of next Sunday's Gospel. The Introit sung this Sunday is: *The earth is full of the Lord's mercy*, etc., and we read the Epistle of the blessed Apostle Peter: *Christ suffered for us*.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on Christ's care for us, who are his people and the sheep of his pasture: *I am the good shepherd*.)**

3. Let us say, then: *I am the good shepherd*, etc. Christ may well say, 'I am', for to him nothing is past or future, but all is present to him. He himself says in the Apocalypse:

*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, saith the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*. [Apoc 1.8]

and in Exodus:

*I am who am. Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel: He who is hath sent me to you.*[Ex 3.14]

He also says well: *I am the good shepherd*. A shepherd or 'pastor' is one who feeds; and Christ feeds us daily with his body and blood, in the sacrament of the altar. In the first book of Kings Jesse said:

*There remaineth yet a young one, who keepeth the sheep*. [1Kg(Sm) 16.11]

Our David, humble and meek, feeds us like a good shepherd. He is our Abel, too, who as Genesis tells was a shepherd, and whom fratricidal Cain (the Jewish people) killed out of envy. He is the shepherd of whom the Father says in Ezekiel:

*I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David (i. e. my son Jesus), and he shall feed them and he shall be their shepherd*. [Ezek 34.3]

and in Isaiah:

*He shall feed the flock like a shepherd. He shall gather together the lambs with his arm and shall take them up in his bosom, and he himself shall carry them that are with young*. [Is 40.11]

He speaks after the manner of a good shepherd, who leads his flock to pasture and back again. The little lambs who cannot walk he gathers in his arms and holds in his bosom; he carries the pregnant ewes that are weary. The expression 'with young' may mean pregnant or newly delivered.

So Jesus Christ feeds us each day with the Gospel teachings and the sacraments of the Church. He gathers us in his arms, stretched out on the Cross; as John says:

*to gather together in one the children of God that were dispersed*. [Jn 11.52]

*And he shall take them up in his bosom*. He received us to the bosom of his mercy, as a mother takes her child. He himself says, in Hosea:

*And I was like a foster-father to Ephraim, I carried them in my arms*. [Hos 11.3]

He nourishes us with his blood, like milk. He was wounded on mount Calvary for us, in (or under) his breast, so that he might give us his blood to drink as a mother gives milk to her child. And in his arms, stretched out on the Cross, he carried us.

**(An allegorical and a moral sermon on Christ and on the prelate of the Church: *I heard behind me a great voice*.)**

4. So Peter says, in today's Epistle:

*Who, in his own self, bore our sins in his body on the tree; that we, being dead to sins, should live to justice; by whose stripes you were healed*. [1Pt 2.24]

He carries the pregnant ewes, the souls of penitents who are weighed down yet expectant, the heirs of eternal life. He says in Exodus:

*You have seen what I have done to the Egyptians, how I have carried you upon the wings of eagles, and have taken you to myself*. [Ex 19.4]

He drowned the Egyptians (the demons, or mortal sins) in the Red Sea, the bitterness of

penitence made red with the blood of tears and afflictions; and he bore penitents upon eagles' wings when, all earthly things despised, he carries them to heaven to gaze with unblinking eyes upon the sun of justice. Yes, he says well: I am the good shepherd. David says: *Thou art good; and in thy goodness teach me* [Ps 118.68], thy straying sheep, for *I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost* [Ps 118.176]. The Book of Wisdom says:

*O how good and sweet is thy spirit, Lord, in all things*. [Wisd 12.1]

*The good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep*. Here he expresses the essence of the good shepherd, his readiness to give his life for his sheep. This is what Christ did. In today's Epistle, Peter says:

*Christ also suffered for us, leaving you and example, that you should follow in his steps*. [1Pt 2.21]

The Gloss says, "Rejoice because Christ has died for you. And listen to what follows*: leaving you an example*, of insults, tortures, the Cross and death." The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, and at the end of the Epistle Peter says:

*You were as sheep going astray; but now you have been converted to the shepherd and bishop of your souls*. [1Pt 2.25]

What great mercy! As the Introit of today's Mass says:

*The earth is full of the mercy of the Lord. By a Word (the Son of God) the heavens (the Apostles and their followers) were established*, [cf. Ps 32.5-6]

lest they be like sheep going astray; but they are kept under the staff of the shepherd and bishop of their souls.

**(A sermon on the seven things necessary for the prelate: I *saw seven golden candlesticks*.)**

5. The sheep for whom the good shepherd, Jesus Christ, gave his life are those seven churches regarding which there is a **concordance** in the Apocalypse. John says:

*I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying:*

*What thou seest, write in a book and send to the seven churches...*

*to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamus and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.*

*And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me.*

*And, being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;*

*and, in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, one like to the Son of Man,*

*clothed with a garment down to the feet, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.*

*And his head and his hairs were white, as white wool and as snow;*

*and his eyes were as a flame of fire;*

*and his feet were like unto fine brass, as in a burning furnace;*

*and his voice as the sound of many waters.*

*And he had in his right hand seven stars.*

*And from his mouth came out a sharp two-edged sword.*

*And his face was as the sun shineth in his power*. [Apoc 1.10-16]

We shall expound this text first allegorically, of Christ; secondly morally, of the prelate of the Church.

[Allegorically.] Ephesus means, ‘my will’, or ‘my counsel’; Smyrna, ‘their song’; Pergamus, ‘dividing the horns’ or ‘cutting the valley’; Thyatira, ‘enlightened’; Sardis, ‘principle of beauty’; Philadelphia, ‘keeping or saving one who clings to the Lord’; and Laodicea, ‘beloved tribe’. The *seven golden candlesticks* denote all the churches, burning and alight with the wisdom of the divine Word. Just as candlestick is made of gold, tried in the fire and beaten out, so the Church is completed by being purified with tribulations and spread out through the blows of trials*. In the midst of the seven candlesticks*, that is, in the community of all the churches, because God offers himself to all and is ready to help all, *I saw one like to the Son of Man*: an angel in the person of Christ, not a son of man, but ‘like’ him, because he dies no more; or ‘like’ a son of man in that though he is without sin, he bears the likeness of our sinful flesh. *Clothed with a garment down to the feet*, a priestly garment, his flesh in which he once offered himself, and still offers himself daily, re-presenting himself to God the Father. *And girt about the paps with a golden girdle*, the girdle of charity, whereby he gave himself up to death for us.

*And his head and his hairs were white, as white wool and snow*. The head signifies divinity, for the Apostle says: *The head of Christ is God* [1Cor 11.3]; or it is Christ himself, who is the head of the Church [cf. Eph 5.23], and in whom are all things needful

for the ruling of the Church. The hairs are the faithful, attached to the head. Head and hair, Christ and christians, are white as wool, with the whiteness of simplicity and purity; and as snow, with the bright whiteness of immortality: for as he lives, so we shall live with him [cf. Jn 14.19]. *And his eyes were as a flame of fire*. The eyes, the gaze of the grace of Jesus Christ, melt the heart frozen with sin as a flame of fire does ice. *The Lord looked at Peter* [Lk 22.61] with eyes of mercy, and he wept bitterly, because the ice of his heart was melted by tears of compunction. *And his feet*, that is, preachers who carry him throughout the world*, Were like unto fine brass as in a burning furnace*. Not any brass, but *'oricalch'*, which resembles gold and bronze (Greek *calchos*, bronze). Gold represents the brightness of wisdom, and bronze the resonance of eloquence. The feet of Jesus Christ are like *oricalch*, because preachers should shine with the brightness of wisdom and with resounding eloquence.

*And his voice as the sound of many waters*. The preaching of Christ has the power of water to cleanse; as he said to the Apostles, *You are clean by reason of the word which I have spoken to you* [Jn 15.3]. The voice of Jesus Christ reaches many peoples, who are like the waters in the flux of mortality. Also, *his voice is as the sound of many waters*, bestowing the plentiful waters of grace*. And he had in his right hand seven stars*. These are the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, which he has in his right hand, the hand for giving. From the treasury of his magnificence, he gives graces to whom he will, when he wills and how he wills. Alternatively, the stars are the bishops, who should give light to others by their word and example. He has them in his right hand, indicating the greater gifts, which are signified by the right hand. *And from his mouth came out a sharp two-edged sword*. From his mouth, that is, by his instigation, there went forth preaching which cuts in two ways. The Old Testament cuts carnal works, and the New Testament cuts desires. *And his face was as the sun shineth in his power*. Good prelates of the Church are the face of Jesus Christ, as are all the saints, for in them we recognize Christ, as by his face. They shine like the sun *in his power*, that is, at noon on a cloudless day; or else, they will shine like the sun when it shall be fixed in eternity, they will be like the true sun, Jesus Christ.

**(A sermon against those who abandon theology and follow lucrative sciences: *Sing to the Lord a new song*.)**

6. Morally. I am the good shepherd. Blessed is that prelate of the Church who can say, 'I am a good shepherd'. To be good, he must needs be like the Son of Man, in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks of which John speaks: *I saw seven golden candlesticks*. These represent the seven qualities a prelate of the Church should have: cleanness of life, knowledge of Holy Scripture, eloquence of tongue, fervency in prayer, compassion for the poor, discipline over subordinates, and conscientious care for the people committed to him. These seven candlesticks are concordant with the meaning of the seven churches.

Ephesus ('my will', or 'my counsel') is cleanness of life, of which the Apostle says:

*This is the will of God, your sanctification... that every one of you should know how to*

*possess his vessel in sanctification and honour*. [1Thess 4.3-4]

and Isaiah: *Take counsel, gather a council* [Is 16.3], meaning, take counsel that you may live cleanly as regards your soul; and gather (that is, restrain) the council of your five senses, that you may live chastely as regards your body.

Smyrna (‘their song’) is the knowledge of Holy Scripture, as in: *Sing to the Lord a new song* [Ps 95.1]. All worldly knowledge, how to make money, is the ‘old song’, the song of Babylon. Only theology is the ‘new song’, sweetly sounding in the Lord’s ear and renewing the soul. This should be ‘their song’, of prelates, that is. If, as the first book of Kings tells us, there was no blacksmith in Israel, no wonder the children of Israel went down to the Philistines to sharpen their ploughshares, spades, axes and rakes [cf. 1Kg (Sm) 13.19-20]. But (thanks be to God!) in Israel, the Church, there is not just one smith but many smiths- I mean theologians- who know well how to sharpen and best make ready ploughshare, spade, axe and rake. The ploughshare turns the soil, the spade lifts it up, the axe cuts down trees, and the rake (made of iron with a handle) is needed to cultivate the field. These instruments of labour represent the various effects of preaching: turning the soil of cupidity and the earth of wickedness, and lifting it from the face of the mind; cutting the dry branches from the unfruitful tree, and cultivating the field of the Church militant. So why do the children of Israel (prelates) go down to the Philistines (meaning ‘falling from drink’), to the money-making sciences? They go down for this reason: to get drunk on transitory honours, on greed, lust, ambition for vainglory, and money. And when they are drunk, they fall into the depth of hell. St Bernard[2] says of them, "Unhappy indeed is ambition, which knows not how to walk in the ambit of what is great. They love the first seats, and I fear for them, because they are like over-ripe figs, ready to fall. They should take care, lest desiring the first seats they miss even the second seats, and end up taking the lowest seats in hell."

**(A sermon on blessed Paul: *Canst thou bind the rhinoceros?*)**

Pergamus (‘dividing the horns’ or ‘cutting the valley’) is skill in speaking from what one has learned, which divides the horns of the proud, and cuts the valley of the carnal. The Lord says through the Prophet: *I will break all the horns of sinners* [Ps 74.11]; and in Job:

*Canst thou bind the rhinoceros with thy thong to plough,*

*or will he break the clods of the valleys after thee?* [Job 39.10]

"The rhinoceros, a small animal like a young goat, with a very sharp horn on its nose, resembles blessed Paul, who, though he breathed threats and slaughter when he went to Damascus, was bound by the thong of divine power, and set to plough (that is, to preach)."[3] So the Lord said to Ananias:

*This man is to me a vessel of election, to carry my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel*. [Ac 9.15]

He breaks the clods of the valleys, the minds of the carnal and unfaithful, with the ploughshare of preaching.

Thyatira (‘enlightened’) is fervency in prayer, which enlightens the mind. The Apocalypse says;

*The glory of God hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof*. [Apoc 21.23]

The lamb is noted for innocence and simplicity, two things necessary for whoever prays. They enlighten the mind of someone praying like the light of a lamp.

Sardis (‘principle of beauty’) is compassion for the poor, which drives out the leprosy of avarice and bestows beauty on the soul; for:

*Give alms; and behold, all things are clean to you*. [Lk 11.41]

Philadelphia (‘keeping or saving one who clings to the Lord’) is discipline over subordinates, keeping one who adheres to the Lord in his service, and saving him from the danger of death. As the Apostle says to the Hebrews:

*All chastisement for the present seemeth not to bring with it joy but sorrow; but afterwards it will yield to them that are exercised by it the most peaceable fruit of justice*. [Heb 12.11]

Laodicea (‘beloved tribe’ of the Lord) is the christian people of the Catholic Church, over whom the prelate should watch with great care. Regarding love for the people, John says:

*Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end*. [Jn 13.1]

He loved them so much, that is, that his love led him even to death.

These are the seven candlesticks which enlighten all the churches, gathered by the Spirit of sevenfold grace. In the midst of them, like Jesus Christ the Son of Man, the prelate should walk in poverty, humility and obedience, wearing the priestly robe, the tunic of fine linen that Aaron wore, which signifies chastity of body which should be added to cleanness of heart.

7. There follows: *Girt about the paps with a golden girdle*. Daniel saw a man girded about the loins, because in the Old Testament carnal actions are restrained. John saw a girdle at the breast, because in the New Testament even thoughts are judged. It is with the golden girdle of the love of God that the breasts, flowing with evil thoughts, are restrained.

So there follows: *His head and his hairs were white, as white wool and as snow*. The head, which includes all the senses, represents the mind which is the 'head' of the soul. The 'hairs' are thoughts. In the mind there is usually uncleanness and the heat of sin. Mind and thoughts must be like white wool, in opposition to the uncleanness of sin, and like snow in opposition to its heat.

*And his eyes were as a flame of fire*. The prelate's 'eyes' are contemplation of God and compassion for his neighbour. They must be like a flame of fire, radiating simplicity with respect to God, and innocence towards his neighbour.

*And his feet were like unto fine brass as in a burning furnace*. The 'feet' are the affections of the mind and the effects of action. In these two feet Mephiboseth (meaning 'man of shame') fell from his nurse and was made lame [cf. 2Kg(Sm) 4.4]. He represents the sinner, the man of eternal shame, who by mortal sin falls from his nurse (the grace of the Holy Spirit) and is made lame in both feet. The feet of the good prelate, however, should be like *orichalc*, which, as said above, has the colour of gold and bronze. Gold represents the affection of the mind, bronze the resonant effect of god action. Orichalc is often smelted to improve the colour; just so, the good prelate becomes more glorious the more he passes through the fire of tribulation.

*And his voice as the sound of many waters*. Just as many waters, when in flood, break through every obstacle, so the voice of the prelate's preaching should overthrow every obstacle of vice, every hindrance to salvation.

*And he had in his right hand seven stars*. These stars are the seven glories of soul and body: wisdom, friendship and concord for the soul; brightness, agility, subtlety and immortality for the body. These should be 'in his right hand', whatever he is thinking and doing, so that he may have these seven stars on the 'right hand' of eternal life, when he is set on the right with the sheep.

*And from his mouth came out a sharp two-edged sword*. This sword is confession, which should be sharpened at both edges, to cut away both the spiritual vices of pride and vainglory and the carnal sins of avarice, greed and lust.

*And his face was as the sun shineth in his power*. The prelate's 'face' is what we recognize him by, namely, his works. *By their fruits ye shall know them* [Mt 7.16]. If these be good, they will shine like the sun in its power. The Lord says:

*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven*. [Mt 5.16]

If the prelate is like that, he will truly be able to say: *I am the good shepherd*.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the four horses and what they signify; and on the nature of myrtle, the shrub and the nettle, and their meaning: *I saw, and behold a white horse*.)**

8. There follows, secondly:

*The hireling, and he that is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming and leaveth the sheep and flieth; and the wolf catcheth and scattereth the sheep. And the hireling flieth, because he is a hireling; and he hath no care for the sheep*. [Jn 10.12-13]

A little earlier in the same chapter, the Lord says:

*Amen, amen, I say to you: He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold but climbeth up another way, the same is a thief and a robber*.. [Jn 10.1]

There are four persons to take note of, then: the good shepherd, the thief and robber, the hireling, and the wolf.

These are the four horses, regarding which there is a **concordance** in the Apocalypse:

*And I saw, and behold a white horse.*

*And he that sat on him had a bow, and there was a crown given him;*

*and he went forth conquering that he might conquer...*

*And there went out another horse that was red.*

*And to him that sat thereon was given that he should take peace from the earth,*

*and that they should kill one another; and a great sword was given him...*

*And, behold, a black horse.*

*And he that sat on him had a pair of scales in his hand.*

*And I heard as it were a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying:*

*Two pounds of wheat for a penny, and thrice two pounds of barley for a penny;*

*and see thou hurt not the wine and the oil...*

*And, behold, a pale horse;*

*and he that sat on him, his name was Death.*

*And Hell followed him; and power was given to him over the four parts of the earth,*

*to kill with sword, with famine and with death and with the beasts of the earth*. [Apoc 6.2,4,5-6,8]

Allegorically*. I saw, and behold a white horse*. The white horse stands for the human nature of the good shepherd, Jesus Christ. It is called a 'white' horse, because it is free from every stain of sin. Of this horse, Zechariah says:

*I saw by night, and, behold, a man riding upon a red horse; and he stood among the myrtle-trees that were in the bottom*. [Zech 1.8]

The 'night' in which this vision was seen represents the darkness of the mystics. The man on a red horse is the Saviour, whose robe (his flesh) is red with the blood of his Passion, shown to the captive people as a red horse. In the Apocalypse, John represents the same to the liberated people as a white horse. He stands among the myrtle-trees, the angelic powers who minister to him even in 'the bottom', when his is in the flesh. So Matthew says: *And angels came and ministered to him* [Mt 4.11]

Alternatively, 'among the myrtle-trees' means the place where myrtles grow. The myrtle is a sweet-smelling tree, of soothing power. It grows in coastal areas. It signifies the cleanness of the just man, sweet-smelling towards his neighbour, and of soothing power to himself. It is found mostly on the shores of compunction of heart. Isaiah says:

*Instead of the shrub, shall come up the fir-tree,*

*and instead of the nettle, shall come up the myrtle-tree*. [Is 55.13]

The 'shrub' refers to a salty plant, the wild nard, akin to the willow. The fir-tree is taller than all other trees. The 'shrub' is avarice, bitter and unfruitful, and in its place the fir-tree of heavenly contemplation grows up when God infuses grace into the mind. The nettle, whose touch brings a burning pain, is of a fiery nature. It denotes the lust of the flesh. In its place the Lord makes the myrtle of continence to grow. So, the Lord stands 'among the myrtle-trees', those who in the strength of purity and the odour of good repute serve God 'in the bottom' of humility.

Let us say, then: *I saw; and, behold, a white horse. And he that sat on him had a bow*. The rider on the horse is his divine nature, which sits upon his human nature like a warrior. The bow, made of a string and wood, represents God's mercy and justice. Just as the string bends the wood, so mercy bends justice. So James says: *Mercy exalteth*

*itself above judgement* [Jas 2.13]. In his first coming, Christ brought with him the string of tender mercy, to take hold of sinners; in his second coming he will strike with the wood of justice, rendering to each according to his works*. And there was a crown given him*. To Christ, God and man, a crown was given according to the humanity wherewith *his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals* [cf. Cant 3.11]; or else, a crown of thorns given him by his step-mother, the Synagogue. And he went forth conquering that he might conquer. *He went forth to that place which is called Calvary* [Jn 19.17], conquering the world so that he might conquer the devil.

9. Morally. *I saw; and, behold, a white horse*. The white horse represents the body of the good shepherd and prelate of the Church. It should be white with the whiteness of chastity. The warrior on this horse is his spirit, which should control it with the bridle of abstinence and the spurs of divine love and fear, to win the prize of eternal life. "There is no harm in applying the spur to make a horse gallop."[4] The bow represents Holy Scripture, the Old Testament being the wood and the New Testament the string which bends its harshness. The arrow is understanding, which pierces the heart. The good shepherd should have this bow in his ‘hand’, his work. Job says:

*My bow in my hand shall be repaired*; [Job 29.20]

and the bow in the hand is repaired when preaching is reinforced by actions. *And there was a crown given him*. The crown on the head is a pure intention in the mind, of which Jeremiah says:

*The crown is fallen from our head. Woe to us, because we have sinned*. [Lam 5.16]

The crown falls from the head when the mind loses its pure intention; so woe betide him*! And he went forth conquering that he might conquer*. He goes forth from worldly cupidity, conquering the lust of the flesh so that he may conquer the pride of the devil. If the prelate’s ‘horse’ is like this, he may well say: *I am a good shepherd*.

*And there went out another horse, that was red*, etc. The red horse is the thief and robber who does not enter by the door into the sheepfold. The door is Christ, through which no-one enters who seeks the things that are his own, not those of Jesus Christ [cf. Phil 2.21]. The robber hides, to despoil and kill the unwary. The thief likes the darkness of night, to steal what belongs to another. Whoever seeks honours to satisfy his own ambition, not being *called by God, as Aaron was* [Heb 5.4], is both a thief and a robber. Whoever seeks preferment by simony is a thief: he usurps the office of a shepherd by simony as in the darkness of night, and he makes his own what belongs to another. He is also a robber, hiding under a cloak of holiness, a wolf in sheep’s clothing, an ostrich pretending to be a hawk. He robs the unwary of their virtue, and kills them in soul. He is well called ‘a red horse’.

The rider on this horse is the spirit of ambition and temporal glory, *which takes peace from the earth*, that is, from the mind of the thief and robber himself. The sprit of ambition

will not let the wretch have peace of mind. He is like a hunter pursuing creatures that run away, chasing after temporal things. Blessed Bernard[5] says, "You multiply prebends, you rise to be an archdeacon, you aspire to be a bishop. You rise step by step, but at a stroke and in one step you go down to hell." And again, "The careful spy goes round, deceiving and disguising, bowing and scraping, crawling on hands and knees: anything to thrust himself into the patrimony of the Crucified."

Alternatively, *it takes peace from the earth* when by this son of perdition it sows discord in the Church. So it goes on, *that they may kill each other*. Simoniac prelates, thieves and robbers, kill each other with the sword of discord and envy. They drag each other down, murmuring and railing at each other. As Isaiah says:

*The hairy ones shall dance there*. [Is 13.21]

*The hairy ones shall cry out one to another*. [Is 34.14]

In the Church today the ‘hairy ones’, simoniacs and money-grubbers, dance and play; and one simoniac accuses another, and all day long there are law-suits and court-cases, shouting, jostling and tearing apart. So there follows: *There was given him a great sword*. This sharp and polished sword is temporal glory, and with it and for it the unhappy men wound and kill each other.

**(A sermon against the wicked prelate: *O shepherd and idol*; and: *Heli lay in his place*; and: *Chanaan, a deceitful balance in his hand*.)**

10. *And, behold, a black horse, and he that sat on him had a pair of scales in his hand*. The black horse is the hireling, of whom the Lord says:

*The hireling, and he that is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming*, etc.

The hireling who works for money is the prelate who serves the Church for temporal gain only. The Prophet says of him:

*He will praise thee when thou shalt do well to him*. [Ps 48.19]

and, in John, the Lord says:

*Amen, amen, I say to you, you seek me, not because you have seen miracles, but because you did eat of the loaves and were filled*. [Jn 6.24]

[As the song says:] "When filled is the belly, it sings ‘Mercy!’ so freely."

This hireling is no shepherd, he is an ‘idol’, as Zechariah says:

*O shepherd and idol, that forsaketh the flock:*

*the sword upon his arm and upon his right eye:*

*his arm shall quite wither away;*

*and his right eye shall be utterly darkened*. [Zech 11.17]

The ‘arm’ is the strength to work, the ‘eye’ is the light of reason. He says, ‘shepherd and idol’, but it would be more correct to say, ‘no shepherd, but an idol’. You are so defiled that you are called not just an idolater, but an idol. An idol is called ‘God’, but it is not. So, too, is the bad shepherd who abandons the flock because the sheep are not his. The sword of the Lord’s anger will be upon his arm and his right eye, so that his strength and boasted bravery will be withered and parched of grace and good works, and the light of reason will be obscured by earthly shadows. Thus he will be made powerless to work, and blinded from discernment, by the just judgement of God.

So it says in the first book of Kings:

*Heli lay in his place, and his eyes were grown dim that he could not see the lamp of the Lord before it went out*. [1Kg(Sm) 3.2-3]

Heli (‘outsider’) is the prelate motivated by money, an outsider to God’s kingdom. He lies ‘in his place’, wallowing in the flesh, and dissolute. His eyes, the light of reason and understanding, have grown dim with the love of earthly things, so that he cannot see the lamp of God (grace) before it goes out. That is, he does not care or even recognise that he lacks the light of grace, precisely because that very light of grace has gone out in him. Many there are who are so blinded that they do not realise that they have lost God’s grace, precisely because they have fallen from grace into the blindness of mortal sin. So the Apocalypse well says: *Behold a black horse*, the hireling who is covered by the shades of sin, not the clear blue sky of grace.

*And he that sat on him had a pair of scales in his hand*. The rider of the black horse, the hireling, is the spirit of business. Spurred on by this, he sells for a price the dove (the grace of God, which should be given freely) as if he were a tradesman. In this way, he makes the house of God his place of business [cf. Jn 2.16]. He holds a deceitful balance in his hand, as Hosea says:

*He is like Canaan, there is a deceitful balance in his hand;*

*he hath loved oppression*. [Hos 12.7]

Canaan (‘trader’) is the ecclesiastical hireling, entangled in worldly business and with no

care for the Lord's sheep. St Jerome[6] says, "Business in a cleric is like usury in a layman."

He has a deceitful balance in his hand, because he preaches one thing and does another; does one thing, while appearing to do something else. He preaches poverty, yet is avaricious; he preaches chastity, and is lustful; he preaches fasting and abstinence, and is a glutton. He puts heavy and insupportable burdens on men's shoulders, but will not lift a finger to move them himself [cf. Mt 23.4]. This is the deceitful balance, against which the Lord says:

*Let the balance be just and the weights equal*. [Lev 19.36]

A balance consists of two scales and a cross-beam, hanging freely. The two scales are contempt for the world and desire for the heavenly kingdom. The cross-beam is the love of God and neighbour. It is a true balance if it gives each his due: contempt to the world, obedience to God, affection to the neighbour. In the hand of Canaan, the hireling trader, the balance is not true but deceitful. The Prophet says:

*He hath done deceitfully: that his iniquity may be found unto hatred*, [Ps 35.3]

because he has loved lying and deceiving.

The hireling trader, in Ezekiel's words, *sews cushions under every elbow and makes pillows for the heads of persons of every age* [cf. Ezek 13.18], because he flatters vices, smoothes sins, and does not impose suitable penances, and all for the sake of gain. He veils his avarice under an appearance of mercy and compassion, saying: *Peace, peace. And there is no peace* [cf. Ezek 13.10]. He makes souls seem alive that are not alive [cf. Ezek 13.19], and so he deceives the faithful of Jesus Christ, to whom the words refer: *Two pounds of wheat for a penny*, etc.

The two-pound measure held two pints. The wheat is faith, and the penny is the blood of Christ. The measure represents the faithful of the Church, formed of two peoples and bought with the blood of Jesus Christ. *And three pounds of barley for a penny*. The three pounds are the same faithful christians, established in low estate, founded on the faith of the Holy Trinity, and similarly bought with the penny of Christ's blood.

Alternatively, the wheat represents religious, and the barley lay-folk. The jar of wheat is the religious life, which should be white on the inside, by purity of mind, and red outside by discipline of the body. It holds two pints, the love of God and the love of neighbour, which bring every man to perfection. Barley, which dries out before the other kinds of grain, represents the laity, who quickly wither when the sun of persecution rises*, believing for a while, and in time of persecution falling away* [cf. Lk 8.13]. The triple measure of barley stands for all faithful lay-people of the Church, who at least have faith in the Holy Trinity. Both religious and lay-folk are redeemed for one penny, stamped with the king's image and superscription, the precept of obedience. If the first man had kept

that command, he would not have lost the image and likeness of God.

*And do not hurt the wine and the oil*. The wine that inebriates is the contemplative life, which inebriates the mind so that it forgets all temporal things. Oil floats on water, and when put upon water makes clearer those things that are hidden in the depths. This represents the active life, which spreads over our neighbours needs and weakness, and with works of mercy brightens the shadow of poverty. Because the Church is made up of religious and lay people, actives and contemplatives, the hireling is commanded not to hurt them by his bad example. St Gregory[7] says: "The prelate deserves as many deaths as the bad examples he has given to his followers."

**(On the nature of the wolf and what it means: *The hireling, whose own the sheep are not*.)**

11. *The hireling, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming and flieth*. The wolf has paws as strong as a lion's, and whatever he crushes with them cannot survive. He lies in wait for the sheep, and seizes them by the throat to stifle them quickly. His bodily frame is quite rigid, so that he cannot easily bend his neck. He rushes headlong, and so is often fooled. If he sees someone first, it is said that he snatches away their voice as by some natural force; but if he thinks that he has been observed, he puts away his savage ferocity.. When he is hungry and sees nothing convenient to eat, he eats earth; and he climbs a mountain and with open mouth fills his empty belly with wind. There are two things he fears exceedingly: fire, and a well-trodden road. The wolf stands for the devil, and the tyrant of this world whose rider is the devil.

This is the fourth horse, of which the Apocalypse says*: Behold a pale horse, and he that sat on him, his name was Death*, etc. As a warrior uses his horse, so the devil (whose name is Death, because through him death entered the world [cf. Wisd 2.24]) uses the cruel tyrant of this world to assault and trouble the Church of Christ. When the hireling sees him coming, he abandons the sheep and flees, and the wolf seizes and scatters them. The hireling abandons them, the wolf seizes them; the hireling flees, the wolf scatters. The devil is like a wolf, he kills whatever he crushes with his proud feet. David, fearing to be crushed, prayed:

*Let not the foot of the proud come to me*. [Ps 35.12]

Just as all the other limbs stand on the feet, so all the vices are supported by pride, which is the origin of all sin [cf. Ecclus 10.15]. The devil lies in wait for the sheep, the faithful of the Church, and he squeezes their throats so that they may not confess their sins. His pride is so great that he cannot bend his neck to humility. With the reckless rush of temptation he attacks, but is fooled by the saints who are not ignorant of his wiles. If he finds an unwary man, he strikes him dumb: whether to confess his sins or to praise his Creator. But if a man keeps watch over himself, and sees temptation before him, then the devil is ashamed to be found out, and loses the power to tempt. When he does not find in the saints anything to eat, he devours earth, the avaricious and lustful;

he climbs a mountain (those high in dignity) and there refreshes himself with the wind of vainglory and worldly pomp. The devil fears two things above all others: the fire of charity and the trodden way of humility. If the hireling possessed these two qualities, he would by no means run away; but he does flee, because he is a hireling and the sheep are not his.

The hireling and the devil are joined by a certain friendship, and are in a kind of league with one another. The devil says to the prelate, as the king of Sodom said to Abraham*, Give me the souls, and the rest* (wool, flesh and milk) *take to thyself* [cf. Gen 14.21]. The devil and the worldly ruler behave with the prelates of our day, as did the wolves with the fishermen of the Maeotine marshes. It is told that the wolves used to come to places near the fishermen, and would not hurt them if they gave them fish. But if the fishermen would not give, the wolves would break the nets when they were spread on the ground to dry. In like manner, the prelates of the Church give the devil 'fish', souls who live in the waters of Baptism, and give the secular ruler the goods of the Church, in case they should hinder or break their nets of business and temporal scheming and the interests of their blood-relations. So it is well said: *Behold a pale horse, and he that sat on him, his name was Death, and hell followed him*. In other words, those who are insatiable for earthly goods imitate him*. And power was given to him over the four parts of the earth*, that is, over all evil-doers, wherever they dwell, *to kill with sword* (evil persuasion), *with famine* (of the divine word), *and with death* (mortal sin), and the beasts of the earth (the instinctive urges of our unruly flesh).

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the twelve patriarchs, and what they signify: *I heard the number of them that were signed*.)**

12. There follows, thirdly:

*I am the good shepherd, and I know mine, and mine know me. As the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep*. [Jn 10.14-15]

After exposing the guilt of the false shepherd, he reaffirms the model of the true shepherd. *I am the good shepherd*, different from the thief and the hireling, *and I know mine*, who are marked with my signature. These sheep have *his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads* [Apoc 14.1]. There is a **concordance** to this in the Apocalypse. John says:

*I heard the number of them that were signed.*

*A hundred and forty-four thousand were signed,*

*of every tribe of the children of Israel.*

*Of the tribe of Juda, twelve thousand signed.*

*Of the tribe of Ruben, twelve thousand signed.*

*Of the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand signed.*

*Of the tribe of Aser, twelve thousand signed.*

*Of the tribe of Nephtali, twelve thousand signed.*

*Of the tribe of Manasses, twelve thousand signed.*

*Of the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand signed.*

*Of the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand signed.*

*Of the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand signed.*

*Of the tribe of Zabulon, twelve thousand signed.*

*Of the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand signed.*

*Of the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand signed*. [Apoc 7.4-8]

*I heard the number of them that were signed*: that is, I understood what people were to be signed, *a hundred and forty-four thousand*, indicating perfection. A finite number is specified, because by giving a round figure God includes all. *From every tribe of the children of Israel*: that is, from all the people who imitate Jacob in his faith. The number twelve indicates those who, in the four quarters of the earth, are signed with the faith of the Trinity; and to indicate the perfection of all these, we multiply twelve by four, to make forty eight, and multiply again by three to show that this perfection has reference to the Trinity, making now a hundred and forty-four.

*From the tribe of Juda*, etc. Genesis tells how Jacob cursed three of his sons, Ruben, Simeon and Levi, who were first in order of birth. This implies that none of these obtained the right of the first-born, which passed to the fourth son, Juda, whom Jacob praised and blessed, saying: *Juda, thee shall thy brethren praise*. [Gen 49.8]

The names of the patriarchs have the following meanings: Juda (‘confessing’), Ruben (‘son of vision’), Gad (‘girded’), Aser (‘blessed’), Nephthali (‘wideness’), Manasses (‘forgotten’), Simeon (‘hearing sadness’), Levi (‘added’ or ‘taken up’), Issachar (‘reward’), Zabulon (‘habitation of strength’), Joseph (‘addition’) and Benjamin (‘son of the right hand’). Juda is the penitent, who should be accompanied by these eleven brothers. In

confession he should see clearly, in tribulation he should gird himself with wisdom, so that he may fear God (for, *Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord* [Ps 111.1]). In charity he should widen himself, forgetting what lies behind and reaching for what lies ahead [cf. Phil 3.13]. He should be sorry for his sins and grieve, that God may hear him. He should add grief to grief, so as to be taken up from sorrow to joy. Then he will receive the reward of eternal life, in which he will live strongly and confidently, because there will be none to terrify him. Added to the number of angels, endowed with true riches, he will be blessed by the right hand, placed at the right hand and blessed for ever and ever.

**(A sermon on the Passion of Christ, to be imprinted upon the forehead of our soul: *Go through the midst of the city*; and: *We shall be blameless*; and: *A bunch of hyssop*.)**

13. So every perfection of glory and grace is expressed in the meaning of these twelve names; and everyone who desires to attain this perfection must have TAU signed on his forehead:

*The Lord said to the man clothed with linen* [cf. Ezek 9.2]

*Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem,*

*and mark TAU upon the foreheads of the men that sigh*

*and mourn for all the abominations that are committed in the midst thereof*. [Ezek 9.4]

The 'man clothed with linen' is Jesus Christ, clothed with the linen of our flesh. The Father commanded him to mark on the foreheads (the minds) of penitents who sigh in contrition and mourn in confession over all the abominations which they have done or which others do: TAU, the sign of his cross and the remembrance of his Passion. This is the sign of which the spies spoke to Rahab:

*We shall be blameless of this oath which thou made us swear, unless when we come into the land the scarlet cord be a sign, and thou tie it in the window*. [Jos 2.17-18]

So we must do what the Lord commanded in Exodus:

*Dip a bunch of hyssop in the blood that is at thy door, and sprinkle the transom of the door therewith, and both the door cheeks*. [Ex 12.22]

Hyssop is a herb used to purge the lungs. It grows on rocky ground, clinging to the stone with its roots. It stands for the faith of Jesus Christ, of which the Apostle says: *Purifying their hearts by faith* [Ac 15.9], a faith rooted and based in Christ. Do you then, faithful

people, take the bunch of faith and dip it in the blood of Jesus Christ, and sprinkle it on the lintel and door-posts. This lintel is understanding; those posts are will and deed, which should be mindful of Jesus Christ. As the Bride says in Canticles:

*Put me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm*. [Cant 8.6]

The heart denotes the will, the arm action. Both should be marked with the seal of the Passion of Jesus Christ. Whoever is signed with this mark, the Lord knows them and they the Lord. Thus*, I know mine and mine know me; as the Father hath known me, and I know the Father*. The Son knows the Father by himself, we know through him. So he himself says, *No-one knows the Son except the Father, and no-one knows the Father except the Son and him to whom the Son will reveal him*. *And I lay down my life for my sheep*. This is the proof of his love for his Father and for his sheep. So Peter, three times confessing his love, is told to feed the sheep and die for them. "Whence the Lord said three times to him, ‘Feed, feed, feed’; not ‘Shear, shear, shear’."[8]

[FOURTH CLAUSE]

**(An allegorical and a moral sermon on holy Church and the faithful soul: *A woman robed with the sun*.)**

14. There follows, fourthly,

*And other sheep I have that are not of this fold; them also I must bring. And they shall hear my voice; and thee shall be one fold and one shepherd*. [Jn 10.16]

The sheep is an animal soft in wool and body. In the beginning, sheep rather than bulls were offered in sacrifice. The sheep stands for the faithful of the Church, who offer themselves daily upon the altar of the Lord’s Passion, and in the sacrifice of a contrite heart, *as a spotless sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God* [cf. Rom 12.1]. *Other sheep I have* (from the Gentiles) *which are not of this fold* (the people of Israel) *Them also I must bring* (through the Apostles), *and there shall be one fold and one shepherd*. This is the Church, gathered from both peoples.

This is that woman, regarding whom there is a **concordance** in the Apocalypse:

*A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon at her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. And, being with child, she cried travailing in birth, and was in pain to be delivered*. [Apoc 12.1-2]

Allegorically. This woman represents the Church, which is called ‘a woman’ because she is fruitful with many children, whom she has born by water and the Holy Spirit. This is the woman clothed with the sun. The sun shines alone, because all other stars are hidden by its radiance. This sun is Jesus Christ, who dwells in inaccessible light [cf. 1Tim 6.16],

whose brightness hides and darkens the rays of all the saints, if they are compared with him; for *There is none holy as the Lord is* [1Kg(Sm) 2.2]. Job says:

*If I be washed as it were with snow-waters,*

*and my hands shall shine ever so clean:*

*Yet thou shalt plunge me in filth;*

*and my garments shall abhor me*. [Job 9.30-31]

The snow-waters are tears of compunction; the clean hands are perfect deeds; so he is saying, "Even if I were washed in the waters of compunction, and even if my hands should be clean with perfect actions, you would still plunge me in filth by showing up my uncleanness, and my garments (meaning my virtues, or else my bodily members) would make me abhorrent if you were to deal strictly with me." Isaiah says:

*We are all become as one unclean* (a leper);

*and all our justices as the rag of a menstruous woman;*

*And we have fallen as a leaf,*

*and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away*. [Is 64.6]

That Sun alone is good, alone just and holy, with whose faith and grace Holy Church is clothed.

*And the moon under her feet*. The ever-changing moon represents the instability of our wretched condition; hence the verse,

"The play of Fortune changes like the moon;

It grows and wanes, and never stays the same."

And Ecclesiasticus: *A fool is changed as the moon* [Ecclus 27.12]. The fool, friend of the world, changes from the crescent horns of pride to the roundness of carnal desire, and back again. The chances and changes of perishable things should be beneath the Church's feet: the Church's feet being all prelates of the Church, who should uphold it as feet do the body. Beneath those feet all temporal things should be trodden like dung. Luke recounts how,

*As many as were owners of lands or houses sold them, and brought the price of the*

*things they sold, and laid it down before the feet of the Apostles*, [Ac 4.34-35]

for they reckoned it all as rubbish.

*And on her head a crown of twelve stars*. The twelve stars are the twelve Apostles, who lighten the night of this world. *You are the light of the world*, says the Lord [Mt 5.14]. The crown of twelve stars which encircles the head is the faith of the twelve Apostles, a crown complete in itself like a circle, receiving neither addition nor diminution. The Church has children, whom she conceives by the seed of God's word. She cries out as she gives birth to penitents, she is in pain to be delivered in the conversion of sinners. So she says with Jeremiah, in the words of Baruch:

*I am left alone. I have put off the robe of my peace,*

*and I have put upon me the sack-cloth of supplication,*

*and I will cry to the Most High in my days.*

*Be of good comfort, my children. Cry to the Lord:*

*and he will deliver you out of the hands of the princes your enemies...*

*For I sent you forth with mourning and weeping,*

*but the Lord will bring you back to me with joy and gladness for ever*. [Bar 4.19-21-23]

This is what takes place on Ash Wednesday, when penitents are excluded from the Church, and on Maundy Thursday, when they are received back.

**(A sermon for a community of religious: *Spread thy mantle, wherewith thou art covered*.)**

15. Morally. *A woman clothed with the sun*, etc. This is the faithful soul, of which Solomon says in Proverbs:

*Who will find a valiant woman?*

*Far and from the uttermost coasts is the price of her*. [Prov 31.10]

Blessed is that soul which, clothed with power from on high, stands firm in prosperity and adversity, and valiantly conquers the powers of the air. The price of this woman is Jesus Christ, who for her redemption came from afar, the bosom of the Father, as regards his divinity; and from the uttermost coasts, his poor parents, as regards his humanity.

Alternatively, we may take the price as the virtues; with this price we are redeemed. As Solomon says, *The ransom of a man's life are his riches* [cf. Prov 13.18], meaning his virtues. Virtue is 'from afar', for while vices are familiar to us, virtue is from above.

This woman is clothed with the sun. Note that the sun has three properties: whiteness, brilliance, and heat. Whiteness represents chastity, brilliance is humility, and heat charity. From these three is made the mantle of the faithful soul, the bride of the heavenly Bridegroom. Of this mantle, Boaz said to Ruth:

*Spread thy mantle, wherewith thou art covered, and hold it with both hands. And when she spread it and held it, he measured six measures of barley, and laid it upon her*. [Ru 3.15]

Boaz means 'strong', and Ruth 'seeing' or 'hastening'. Let us se what is meant by the spreading of the mantle, the two hands and the six measures of barley. Ruth is the soul, who sees the misery of the world, the deceit of the devil and the lust of the flesh, and hastens to the glory of eternal life. She spreads her mantle when she attributes chastity, humility and charity not to herself but to God; and she she shows them forth for the edification of her neighbour. She holds it with the two hands of fear and love, so as not to lose it. The hand gives a man strength, it is the body's tool. It carries food to the mouth and does all kinds of work. Likewise the fear and love of God strengthen a man lest he fall, and they supply him with the strength of grace to persevere. If the soul spreads out and holds this mantle, Boaz (Jesus Christ, strong and powerful) will measure out six measures of barley: the strictness and harshness of penance, consisting in these six things, contrition, confession, fasting, prayer, bestowal of alms and final perseverance.

**(A sermon on the mortification of the flesh: *And the moon under her feet*.)**

There follows: *And the moon under her feet*. The moon has three properties contrary to those mentioned above. It is blemished, dark and cold. The moon is the human body, which as time passes grows up and grows frail, returning to the point at which it began, for *earth thou art and to the earth shalt thou return* [cf. Gen 3.19]. It is blemished by being conceived in sin; by being under the shadow of infirmity; and by growing cold in its final reduction to ashes. Alternatively, it is blemished by being stained with lust, blinded with the shadow of pride, and made cold with hate and icy rancour.

The woman should have this moon beneath her feet, beneath the affections of her mind, so that the flesh may serve the spirit, and sensuality serve reason. We are told in the first book of Kings that Abigail mounted an ass to come to David [cf. 1Kg(Sm) 25.42]. Abigail ('my father's joy') represents the soul converted to penitence, for *there will be joy before the angels in heaven*, etc. [Lk 15.10]. She mounts an ass when she afflicts her body and makes it serve reason, thus approaching David, that is, Jesus Christ. There is a **concordance** to this in the prophet Nahum:

*Go into the clay and tread, work it and make brick.* [Nah 3.14]

Go into the clay, remembering that you are made from clay, and as it were rubbish. Sit with the sorrowful Job on the dunghill, and scrape the pus of guilt with the potsherd of harsh penance [cf. Job 2.8]. Hold your stinking flesh in your hand like a nosegay, and tread the clay: afflict your body. Clay can be baked hard by fire, or washed away by water. Your flesh is made strong in the fire of affliction, weakened by pleasures. So Jeremiah asks:

*How long wilt thou be dissolute in deliciousness, O wandering daughter?* [Jer 31.22]

And Hosea:

*Israel hath gone astray like a wanton heifer*. [Hos 4.16]

A wanton heifer runs about with a stupid face, refuses her food, is mounted by the bull whom she does not see, and while crushed by his weight takes pleasure in lust. Just so the flesh when in the midst of pleasures runs about the meadows of licentiousness. She refuses the food of the soul, is mounted by the devil whom she does not see, and while he oppresses her with the weight of sin she burns whith lust.

**(A sermon on the twelve stars and their significance: *And a crown of twelve stars*.)**

There follows: *And a crown of stars on her head*. The stars keep fixed positions in the sky, and are carried along with it in perpetual motion. What seem to be 'falling stars' are not stars, but fiery particles falling from the air, caused by the wind when it seeks the higher regions and draws after it some of the ethereal fire. But upon the head of the soul (the mind) there should be a crown of twelve stars, which are virtues. Three at the front- faith, hope and charity; three on the right- temperance, prudence and fortitude; at the back-the remembrance of death, of the dreadful day of Judgement and of the everlasting pains of hell; and on the left- patience, obedience and final perseverance.

We ask you, then, Lord Jesus, that you who are the good Shepherd keep us your sheep, and defend us from the hireling and the wolf; and crown us with the crown of eternal life in your kingdom. Grant this, you who are blessed, glorious and to be praised for ever and ever. Let every little sheep, every faithful soul, say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] AUGUSTINE, *De diversis, sermo* 351,4,7; PL 39.1542

[2] GAUFRIDUS, *Declamationes. De colloquio*, etc. 42.51; PL 184.464

[3] cf. GREGORY, *Moralia* XXXI, 16,30-31; PL 76.590-591

[4] OVID, *Epistulae ex Ponto*, II,6,38

[5] GAUFRIDUS, *Declamationes*, 21,25 and 13,14; PL 184.451 and 445

[6] Untraced.

[7] cf. ARISTOTLE, *History of Animals* IX,36,620b5-8; PLINY, Natural History X,10

[8] cf. GAUFRIDUS, *Declamationes*, 11,12; PL 184.444

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

**(The Gospel for the third Sunday after Easter: *A little while, and now you shall not see me*; which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for those who hear the word of God, and what it brings to those who hear*: Go and take the book*.)**

1. At that time, Jesus said to his disciples:

*A little while, and now you shall not see me; and again a little while, and you shall see me; because I go to the Father*. [Jn 16.16]

The angel said to John in the Apocalypse:

*Go and take the book from the hand of the angel... and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter; but in thy mouth it shall be sweet as honey*. [Apoc 10.8-9]

The book, rich in letters, signifies the abundance of holy preaching. This is the well that Isaac, in Genesis, called 'Abundance' [cf. Gen 26.33]. This is the river *whose stream maketh the city of God joyful* [cf. Ps 45.5], the soul in which God dwells. O man, take: take to yourself this book that you may drive out your barrenness with its richness, your neediness with its abundance. And eat it up: he who hears the word of God eagerly eats up the book. In the book of Ezra it says that

*the ears of all the people were attentive to the book*. [Neh 8.3]

Whoever hears the word of God attentively turns his ears to the book. *It will make thy belly bitter*. The belly, which digests the food it receives, supplies life-giving nourishment to the whole body. It stands for the human mind, which should receive God's word and digest it in meditation. When it is well digested, it should pass into every virtue. The word of the Lord makes the belly bitter, because, as Isaiah says,

*The drink shall be bitter to them that drink it*; [Is 24.9]

and Ezekiel:

*I went away in bitterness in the indignation of my spirit*. {Ezek 3.14}

No wonder the word of the Lord makes the mind bitter- it preaches that temporal things will pass away, that our present life is short, that death is bitter and hell terrible*. But in thy mouth it shall be sweet as honey*, because though its commandments are difficult, and the word of preaching is hard, yet to one who loves it is easy and sweet. It is bitter at present, because it pricks to penitence; but it will be sweet in our homeland, because it leads to glory. So the Lord says of these two in today's Gospel, *A little while, and now you shall not see me*.

2. There are three things to note in this Gospel. The first is the short delay of our life, where it begins: *A litlle while and you will not see me*. The second is the vain joy of worldly people*: Amen, amen, I say to you that you will lament and weep*, etc. The third is eternal glory*: I will see you again and your heart will rejoice*, etc. We will **concord** with the three clauses of this Gospel the three last parts of the Apocalypse. The first part treats of the seven angels having vials full of the wrath of God. The second concerns the damnation of the great harlot, worldly vanity. The third concerns the river of the living water, the everlastingness of eternal life.

In the Introit we sing: *Be joyful in God, all the earth*; and the Epistle of blessed Peter is read: *I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims*.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the brevity of temporal glory: *The hope of the wicked is as dust*.)**

3. Let us say, then: *A little while, and now you shall not see me*; as though to say, there remains only a short time until I suffer and am shut in the tomb. And again there is a little while until you see me risen. Alternatively, there is a short time, just three days, when I shall be shut away and not seen; and for a short while again (forty days) I shall be seen risen. *Because I go to the Father*; that is, because it is time for me to put off mortality, and take human nature to heaven.

Morally. In this Gospel, the words 'a little while' occur seven times, to indicate the shortness of our life, which is encompassed in seven days. As St James says:

*What is your life? It is a vapour which appeareth for a while, and afterwards shall vanish away*. [Jas 4.15]

And Job says:

*They spend their days in wealth. And in a moment they go down to hell*. [Job 21.13]

And:

*The praise of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment*. [Job 20.5]

This ‘point of time’ is a point that pierces. It is so short that it cannot be measured, too brief to be divided into parts. A sinner’s life is a point that pricks the conscience, a brief span; whence Wisdom says:

*The hope of the wicked is as dust which is blown away with the wind:*

*and as a thin froth which is dispersed by the storm,*

*and a smoke that is scattered abroad by the wind;*

*and as the remembrance of a guest of one day that passeth by*. [Wisd 5.15]

The pleasure that is looked for from earthly abundance is as unstable as dust. Dust is like the mildew on an apple, or the fruit of a reed, empty and insubstantial as froth. As Hosea says:

*Samaria hath made her king to pass as froth upon the face of the water*. [Hos 10.7]

Samaria means ‘dignity’, which makes its king (the prelate) pass like froth (pride) which is swiftly born away by the storm-blast of affliction. Pleasure, like a smoke of the mind, troubles the eyes; and like a passing guest it leaves nothing behind but dung (the uncleanness of sin). These four similitudes agree with Hosea:

*They shall be as a morning cloud and as the early dew that passeth away, as the dust that is driven with a whirlwind out of the floor and as the smoke out of the chimney*. [Hos 13.3]

The cloud and the dew are put to flight and consumed at the coming of the sun. The dust is caught by the wind, smoke dissolves in the merest breeze. Just so, when the heat of death comes, temporal abundance flees and fails, carnal desire and all vainglory melt away. Woe to those who lose eternal life for the sake of this life’s trifling wealth, for a momentary delight. Seven vices are caught up in the sevenfold round of days of this wretched exile, and so they drink of the seven vials of God’s wrath.

**(A sermon on the seven vices, and how those enmeshed in them are punished with seven punishments: *I heard a great voice*.)**

4. So there is a **concordance** in the Apocalypse:

*I heard a great voice out of heaven saying to the seven angels:*

*Go, and pour out the seven vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.*

*And the first went and poured out his vial on the earth...*

*And the second poured out his vial upon the sea...*

*And the third poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters...*

*And the fourth poured out his vial upon the sun...*

*And the fifth poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast...*

*And the sixth poured out his vial upon that great river Euphrates...*

*And the seventh poured out his vial upon the air*. [Apoc 16.1-2,3,4,8,10,12,17]

The earth stands for the avaricious and usurers; the sea for the proud and puffed up; the rivers and fountains of waters for the lustful; the sun for the vainglorious; the seat of the beast for the envious and slothful; the river Euphrates ('abundance') for drunkards and gluttons; the air for false religious.

Of the earth of avarice, the Lord said to the serpent in Genesis: *Earth shalt thou eat all the days of thy life* [Gen 3.14].

Of the sea of pride, Job says: *The sea saith: It* (wisdom) *is not with me* [Job 28.14]; because *God resisteth the proud* [Jas 4.6; 1Pt 5.5].

Of the river of lust, Exodus tells how Pharaoh commanded all his people*: Whatsoever shall be born of the male sex, ye shall cast into the river* [Ex 1.22]. Pharaoh means 'dispersing' or 'uncovering', and he stands for the devil who disperses the fabric of virtue and strips the mantle of grace from wretched man, leaving him naked. He wants all manly, virtuous and perfect works drowned in the river of lust; but weak and womanish minds, which he can abuse, he will have kept.

Of the sun of vainglory, the Lord says in Matthew, in the parable of the sower*: When the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away* [Mt 13.6]. The seeds are good works, which wither when the sun of vainglory scorches them. Whatever you do for the sake of vainglory, you lose altogether. St Bernard[1] says: "Whence is your glory, dust and ashes? From the holiness of your life? But it is the Spirit which makes holy- not yours, but God's. Does popular acclaim flatter you, when you preach well? But it is God who gives a mouth and wisdom. What else is your tongue but

simply the pen of a ready writer?" And the Philosopher[2] says: "The readiest way to attain glory is to act in such a way that one really is what one wishes to seem."

Of the seat of envy, on which the beast (the devil) sits, we read: *I know where thou dwellest, where the seat of Satan is* [Apoc 2.13]. The envious are the seats of the devil, as Job says:

*Then the beast shall go into his covert, and shall abide in his den*. [Job 37.8]

Covert and den signify the hearts of the envious, darkened with the gloom of envy, a black and gloomy cave.

Of the Euphrates of gluttony, Jeremiah says: *The girdle rotted in the river Euphrates* [cf. Jer 13.7]. The girdle of chastity rots in the abundance of gluttony and drunkenness. The Philosopher[3] says: "Eat and drink so as to live well. Do not live just to eat and drink."

Of the air of false religious, the Apocalypse says: *The air was darkened with the smoke of the pit* [Apoc 9.2]. The pit is cupidity, and its smoke has choked nearly all religious. All those who are entangled with these seven vices, in the seven days of this life, will be drunk with the seven vials, the seven plagues and seven sentences of judgement, in hell. The will be punished both in body and in soul, because they have sinned in both.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the grief of the just and the joy of carnal folk: *Amen, amen, I say to you, that you shall weep*.)**

5. There follows, secondly:

*Amen, amen, I say to you, that you shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice; and you shall be made sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labour, hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but, when she hath brought forth the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world*. [Jn 16.20-21]

All good people weep in the pains of this world, while lovers of the world rejoice. Isaiah says of both:

*The Lord of hosts hath called to weeping and to mourning: to baldness and to girding with sackcloth. And, behold, joy and gladness, killing calves and slaying rams, eating flesh and drinking wine: Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die*. [Is 22.12-13]

All the just are called by God's grace in the weeping of contrition and the mourning of confession; in baldness (the renunciation of temporal things) and girding with sackcloth (the harshness of penance). But the lovers of the world remain in worldly joy, taking pleasure in sin, drunk with gluttony and lust.

**(A sermon against the lovers of this world, carnal folk and fornicators: *I saw a woman seated on a scarlet beast*.)**

6. This is that Babylon, regarding which there is a **concordance** in the Apocalypse:

*I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and seven horns. And the woman was clothed round about with purple and scarlet, and gilt with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand, full of the abomination and filthiness of her fornication*. [Apoc 17.3-4]

The word 'woman' suggests softness, the weakness of those who resemble Eve, from whom sin began. Solomon says of this woman:

*Every woman that is a harlot is like dung in the way*. [Ecclus 9.10]

Dung is spread upon the fields, and the 'woman that is a harlot' means all worldlings who are trodden down by the demons, as dung is trodden by passers-by. The Lord complains of this harlot:

*Of old time thou hast broken my yoke, thou hast burst my bonds, and thou saidst: I will not serve. For on every high hill and under every green tree thou didst prostitute thyself*. [Jer 2.20]

The children of this world are a depraved, adulterous and perverse generation. They are bastard children, companions of thieves (the demons), who have broken the yoke of obedience, burst the bonds of God's commandments, and said, "We will not serve." As in Job:

*Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him?*

*And what doth it profit us if we pray to him?* [Job 21.15]

On every high hill of pride, under every green tree of lust (for lust loves the leafy and shady places), they lie down like harlots for the devil.

So John says rightly: *I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet coloured beast*. The beast is the devil, who lays waste the virtues of the soul. He is bloody in himself and in those who follow him. On him sit worldlings, for he is their foundation, they originate from him. But anyone supported by the devil, who fell from heaven, must fall with him. So Job says:

*In the sight of all he shall be cast down*- [Job 40.28]

he himself, and all the reprobates of whom he is chief.

*Full of names of blasphemy*. The devil has three names, mentioned in the Apocalypse. In Hebrew, *Abaddon*; in Greek, *Apollyon*; in Latin, *Exterminator* [Apoc 9.11]. '*Abd*' means 'slave', while Apollyon may mean the same as Exterminator, or may come from words meaning 'hurtful' or 'hellish'. These are 'names of blasphemy', with which the devil and his members blaspheme God. They are slaves to sin, hurtful and hellish exterminators, putting themselves and others beyond the limits of eternal life.

*Having seven heads and ten horns*. The seven heads are those seven vices of which the Prophet says in the Psalm:

*I have seen iniquity and contradiction in the city.*

*Day and night shall iniquity surround it upon its walls;*

*and in the midst thereof are labour and injustice;*

*and usury and deceit have not departed from its streets*. [Ps 54.10-12]

The city of blood, entirely full of lying, and into which the Lord does not enter, is the multitude of carnal folk gathered together. In it is iniquity towards God, which is mentioned twice here because there are two ways of sinning against God, by commission and by omission. There is also contradiction towards superiors, labour and injustice against oneself, and usury and deceit against neighbour. The ten horns are those of which the Apostle says to the Romans:

*Being filled with all iniquity, malice, fornication, avarice, wickedness; full of envy, murder, contention, deceit, malignity*. [Rom 1.29]

Alternatively, the seven heads and ten horns are those mentioned in the book of Wisdom:

*All things are mingled together: blood, murder, theft and dissimulation, corruption and unfaithfulness, tumults and perjury, disquieting of the good, forgetfulness of God, defiling of souls, changing of nature, disorder in marriage, and the irregularity of adultery and uncleanness, the worship of abominable idols*. [Wisd 14.25-7]

**(A sermon on the sadness of the saints: *The world will rejoice*.)**

7. *And the woman was clothed round about with purple*, etc. Purple stands for the love of dignity, scarlet (the colour of blood) for cruelty of mind, gold for worldly wisdom, precious

stones and pearls for the ostentation of riches. With these the 'woman that is a harlot', great Babylon, the synagogue of Satan, the crowd of carnal folk, is arrayed and adorned. There is added*: Having a golden cup in her hand*. The gold cup or chalice in the hand of Babylon is the glory of the world, golden outside but inside full of filthiness and abomination. As Solomon says:

*Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain*. [Prov 31.30]

With this cup the kings of the world are made drunk, the prelates of the Church, even monks and nuns. So John says:

*With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication; and they who inhabit the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her whoredom*. [Apoc 17.2]

Isaiah says of this drunkenness:

*The Lord hath mingled in the midst thereof the spirit of giddiness:*

*and they have caused Egypt to err in all its works,*

*as a drunken man staggereth and vomiteth*. [Is 19.14]

Giddiness (the word used refers to the way the wind rises and sets the earth in a whirl) is a sickness of the head. In the midst of Egypt (among worldlings), the Lord has mingled, or allowed to be mingled, a spirit of giddiness- covetous love. By its impulse, as by a wind, they reel about, and wander like drunkards unable to find the right way. And just like a drunkard who cannot feel blows when he is dragged away, so are they. As it is said:

*They have beaten me, but I was insensible of pain;*

*they drew me, and I felt not*. [Prov 23.35]

The wretched sinner feels no pain when he is beaten by the demons; he feels nothing as he is dragged by them from sin to sin.

There is a **concordance** to this in the Lamentations of Jeremiah:

*Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, that dwellest in the land of Hus:*

*to thee also shall the cup come, thou shalt be made drunk and naked*. [Lam 4.21]

Edom means 'blood', the 'daughter of Edom' refers to effeminate, pleasure-seeking and

carnal folk. The Prophet is speaking ironically when he says, *Rejoice and be glad*. She rejoices in the abundance of the world, she is glad in the lust of the flesh, she dwells in the land of Hus (‘counsel’), of which Isaiah says:

*The wise counsellors of Pharao have given foolish counsel*. [Is 19.11]

The wise men of this world give foolish counsel: to seek temporal things, to grasp at fleeting things, to believe the false promises of the world. The daughter of Edom is deceived by the false counsel of the world. She is made drunk with the gold chalice of worldly glory. And afterwards she is stripped naked. After the lovers of this world have been made drunk with temporal things, they will be stripped of all good things; and so, naked, they will be condemned to eternal punishment.

So John adds, in the Apocalypse:

*A mighty angel took up a stone, as it were a great mill-stone, and cast it into the sea, saying: With such violence as this shall Babylon, that great city, be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all*. [Apoc 18.21]

The mighty angel is Christ, who overcame the powers of the air. *He took up a stone*, picking up the wicked with their hard hearts, so as to punish them more severely. *Like a great mill-stone* that goes round in the mill of this world and grinds others down, *he casts it in the sea*, the bitterness of hell, so that to the same degree that Babylon exalted itself and took its pleasure, so it will experience torments.

8. So the Lord says well in today’s Gospel:

*The world shall rejoice; and you shall be made sorrowful,*

*but your sorrow shall be turned into joy*. [Jn 16.20]

And their joy shall be turned to sorrow. So, by the same Evangelist, the Lord says:

*Every man at first setteth forth good wine, and... then that which is worse*. [Jn 2.10]

In this world, they drink the wine of gladness, but in the next they will drink the wine of hell. So Jeremiah says:

*Behold, they whose judgement was not to drink of the cup shall certainly drink: and shalt thou come off as innocent? Thou shalt not come off as innocent, but drinking thou shalt drink. For I have sworn by myself, says the Lord, that Bosra shall become a desolation and a reproach and a desert and a curse*. [Jer 49.12-13]

The saints, for whom there is no judgement that they should drink the cup of this world’s

sorrow, drinking in bitterness of heart do drink in the pain of the body. They lament and groan over all the abominations that are done in the midst of the earth. And you, Babylon, mother of fornications*, shalt thou come off as innocent? Thou shalt not come off as innocent*. Because you drink the wine of joy in this world, you will drink the vinegar of hell in the next. St Gregory[4] says, "If the infirmity of mortal life is so great that not even the just, who are to dwell in heaven, can pass through life without toil, because of the immense heap of human misery: how much more may those excluded from heavenly glory expect a sure passage to everlasting damnation?" And he says again, "As often as I think about Job's patience, and call to mind the death of saint John the Baptist, I tell you, sinner: understand from these what will be endured by those whom the Lord rejects, seeing how much is suffered by those who (as the Judge himsef testifies) are to be praised?" What will the desert bush do, when the cedar of paradise is struck with fear?

There follows: *By myself I have sworn, says the Lord*, having no greater to swear by [cf. Heb 6.13], *that Bosra* ('fortified'), that faithless assembly of worldlings that fortifies itself against the Lord with the ramparts of sin and spears of defence, *shall become a desolation* (remaining without the companionship of grace) *and a reproach* (stripped of temporal things) *and a derision* (mocked by the demons) *and a curse* (*Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire*).

There follows: *A woman, when she is in labour, hath sorrow*. She is sad and as it were worn down. In this pilgrimage and exile the saints are worn down, *distressed, afflicted, of whom the world was not worthy*. [Heb 11.37-8]. Peter says to them in today's Epistle:

*Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, to refrain yourselves from carnal desires which war against the soul*. [1Pt 2.11]

A stranger is one who comes from elsewhere; a pilgrim is one journeying outside his homeland. We are all strangers, because we have come from elsewhere, from the joy of paradise into this miserable exile. We are pilgrims, too, cast out from before God's face, and journeying as beggars outside our heavenly homeland.

Let us, then, abstain from carnal desires like Naboth ('remarkable') He preferred to die rather than sell his inheritance [cf. 3(1)Kg 21.1-14]. In the same way we should prefer to suffer any pains, rather than exchange eternal glory for carnal pleasure. If we do so suffer, our sadness will be turned into joy. This agrees with the Introit of today's Mass:

*Shout with joy to God, all the earth:*

*Sing ye a psalm to his name: give glory to his praise*. [Ps 65.1-2]

Three things are mentioned: rejoicing in heart, singing a psalm with the mouth, and giving glory in deeds, so that we may be found fit to come to the glory of eternal joy.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on how God sees us in three ways: *I will see you again*.)**

9. There follows, thirdly:

*But I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice. And your joy no man shall take from you*. [Jn 16.22]

Note that God sees us in three ways. First, by conferring grace. So he said to Nathanael:

*When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw you*. [Jn 1.48]

Those exiled from paradise had clothing of fig-leaves, which make the flesh itch. A man is ‘under the fig tree’ if he chooses to live in the shade of idle talk and the itching of the lustful flesh. God ‘sees’ him when he confers grace on him. Secondly, he ‘sees’ when he conserves the grace he has given. So Genesis says:

*The Lord saw all the things that he had made; and they were very good*. [Gen 1.31]

All the things God makes in us, when he infuses grace, are good. But when he ‘sees’ us by keeping it in us, then they are very good, that is, perfect. Thirdly, he will see us when he takes us to himself. So he says,

*I will see you again, and your hearts shall rejoice*.

The heart is the source of heat, and the origin of the blood, and it is the principle of emotions in matters pleasurable and offensive; and, overall, the movements of every sense begin from it and return to it. The spiritual power remains ultimately in the heart. Death takes place in all other members before the heart, which is the first and last thing to move in us. Because the heart is an organ superior to the others, the Lord says: *Your heart shall rejoice*; just as life proceeds from it, so also does joy.

**(A sermon on the glory of eternal blessedness, and on the brightness of the heavenly Jerusalem: *The angel showed me a river of water of life*.)**

10. *And your joy no man shall take from you*. There is a **concordance** to this in the last part of the Apocalypse:

*The angel showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the street thereof*. [Apoc 22.1-2]

The river denotes perpetuity, the water of life fullness, the clear crystal brightness, the throne of God and of the Lamb the glorified humanity of the God-man. This is your joy,

which no man shall take from you.

Concerning the river of perpetuity, the Lord says in Isaiah

*O that thou had hearkened to my commandments:*

*thy peace had been as a river*. [Is 48.18]

A river has waters that flow continually. O man, if you will attend to the commandments of God, you will rejoice, secure in perpetual peace. Of the fullness of living water, the Psalm says:

*For with thee is the fountain of life*. [Ps 35.10]

It is an unfailing fountain, a fountain that satisfies all, and whoever drinks of it shall never be thirsty. Of brightness, the Apocalypse says:

*The city hath no need of the sun, nor of the moon, to shine in it;*

*for the glory of God hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof*- [Apoc 21.23]

meaning the Son of God. His throne is the humanity in which the divinity humbled itself. From it proceed perpetual light, the living water of eternal satisfaction and the crystalline splendour of divine brightness. They flow in the midst (in the community) of the street of the city, the heavenly Jerusalem; because *God will be all in all* [cf. 1Cor 15.28], and all will receive the same penny, all will share the same reward. They all give thanks to the Incarnate Word, because by him they are made everlasting, fulfilled, glorified and blessed.

We ask you, then, Lord Jesus, that in the seven days of the ‘little while’ of this life, you will make us to conceive the spirit of salvation, and give birth in sadness of heart to the offspring of eternal life; so that we may be made fit to drink from the river of the water of life in the heavenly Jerusalem, and rejoice with you. Grant this, you who are blessed, glorious, to be praised and loved, sweet and immortal for ever and ever. Let every creature say, Amen. Alleluia.

**(A moral exposition of the Gospel: *A woman when she is in labour hath sorrow*; in the prologue of which something is said about the nature of little crows, and of the penitent soul: *A woman forsaken*.)**

11. *A woman, when she is in labour, hath sorrow*. Isaiah says:

*The Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and mourning in spirit*. [Is 54.6]

The Lord, by the inspiration of his grace and the preaching of the Church, calls the woman (the sinful soul, soft and effeminate) to penitence. She is forsaken by the devil and taken up by God. So she says:

*My father* (the devil) *and my mother* (carnal desire) *have left me:*

*but the Lord hath taken me up*. [Ps 26.10]

Those whom the devil forsakes, Christ takes up.

It is said that a raven does not feed its young unless it first sees black feathers growing. Meanwhile, the young ravens survive by exuding from their mouths a froth which attracts flies. The chicks suck inthe froth with the flies, and are marvelously fed. So Job says:

*Who provideth food for the raven, when her young ones cry to God,*

*wandering about, because they have no meat?* [Job 38.41]

And the Psalm says:

*Who giveth to beasts their food: and to young ravens that call upon him*. [Ps 146.9]

If the raven sees white plumage growing on her young, she abandons them and casts them out of the nest.

The raven is the devil, and the raven's children are sinners living in mortal sin, who imitate the blackness of their parent. The prophet Nahum says:

*The faces of them all are as the blackness of a kettle*. [Nah 2.10]

A kettle gets blackened by fire and smoke. 'Faces' means works, by which a man is known as by his face, for *By their fruits ye shall know them* [Mt 7.16]. The works of sinners resemble the blackness of the kettle, blackened by the fire of devilish temptation and the smoke of carnal desire. So Jeremiah says:

*Their face is now made blacker than coals*. [Lam 4.8]

Sinners are children of the devil; but when by the brightness of grace they receive remission of sins, the devil forsakes them and the most loving Lord takes them in the arms of his mercy.

So the words are apt, *A woman forsaken and mourning in spirit*. She says, in the Lamentations of Jeremiah:

*He hath made me desolate, fed with sorrow all the day long*. [Lam 1.13]

She is desolate, deprived of the comfort of temporal things; and fed with sorrow, with a fine confection of three choice ingredients- contrition, confession and satisfaction- and the balm of divine mercy, prepared by the apothecary, the Holy Spirit, as an electuary for the penitent soul. The Lord refers to the penitent in today's Gospel, *A woman, when she is in labour, hath sorrow*, etc.

Because the Lord proposes a likeness to a woman in labour, and her sorrow, to teach us how to be sorry for sin and bring forth good works: we will consider first how, according to Natural science,[5] man is conceived in his mother's womb, how he is formed and carried for nine months, and how he is brought forth in pain. Then we will draw some moral lessons from these facts.

**(On the same subject, something is said about how a human being is conceived in the mother's womb, and what follows, and how these things are to be understood in a moral sense.)**

12. A woman conceives with pleasure and gives birth with pain.

(a) After impregnation, she grows heavy and her eyesight is dimmed. In some women this happens earlier- after ten days- and in others later. After impregnation, pregnant women lose their appetite when hair begins to grow on the baby's head.

(b) The heart is the first organ to be formed, and internal organs are formed before the exterior members. The upper part of the body takes shape first, and appears greater, while the lower part is smaller. The heart has to be formed before the other organs because it is the principle of movement, and the organ that exercises most control. Life proceeds from it.

(c) The heart is situated in the upper part of the body, towards the front. Being the most important organ, it occupies naturally a place of honour.

(d) The heart, of all the inner organs, cannot feel pain or much weakness. This is as it should be, because if the chief part should fail it could not help the rest of the body. The others members draw strength from the heart, not the heart from them.

(e) There is no bone in the heart, except for horses and one kind of cow, and that is because of the size of their bodies. Nature provides a bone for support in these cases, as bone does in general.

(f) After the heart is made, the upper body is formed. The first parts of the embryo to take shape are the head and eyes. The parts below the umbilicus- thighs and legs- are very small, because the lower parts exist only to serve the upper.

(g) The heart has to contain the principle of the senses and other animal powers. That is why it is formed first. Because the heart is hot, and the veins flow out of it, nature puts a cold organ in opposition to the heart, the brain. So after the heart is formed, the head comes next. The head is bigger than the other parts, because from its beginning the brain is large and moist. That is why infants cannot hold their heads up for long, because of the weight of the brain. All the other members receive, first, size and shape; then, colour and refinements of hardness and softness. An artist first draws an outline, and then colours it in to complete his work.

(h) If the little body is to become a male, the expectant mother's colour is better, and her womb is carried forward. There is movement from the fortieth day. The other sex, female, moves from the ninety-first day, and after conception the mother's face is pale, and she finds it slow and wearisome to walk. For either sex, things get more uncomfortable when the hair of the baby begins to grow, and sickness increases for some months at full moon, a time which is also harmful to those who have given birth. If the pregnant woman eats more salty foods, the new-born baby will lack nails.

(i) And note that all four-legged animals are stretched out in the womb, and animals that have no legs lie sideways, like fish (for whales and dolphins carry their offspring in the womb). Other fish lay eggs in the water, and that is why they have little affection for their young, having laboured little on them. So Habbakuk says:

*Thou wilt make them as the fishes of the sea,*

*and as the creeping things that have no ruler*. [Hab 1.14]

(j) All two-legged animals (birds and men) are curled up before birth. They are curled up in egg or womb, with their noses between their knees and their eyes upon their knees. There is a resemblance to the posture of prayer, with bended knee and eyes full of tears from pious meditation.

(k) Their ears are external. All animals to begin with hold their heads high, but when they grow old and approach death their heads hang down. The higher part of the body is larger than the lower, and so like a pair of scales the heavier weight inclines to the earth.

(l) The hands of the unborn human are held across the ribs; and when it is born, the hand goes straightway to the mouth.

(m) When a woman is near to delivering her womb, and at the moment of maturity, it is very suitable for her to hold her breath, because a certain yawning can hold up childbirth with fatal delay. This chiefly happens to women who do not have a large rib-cage, because they cannot easily hold their breath in. This disposition can be made worse in many women, at the time they become pregnant. This happens when a leisured life causes much superfluity in them. In working women, pregnancy does not show up as in

other women, and she may give birth quickly, because her work uses up excess fat. Work encourages heavy breathing, so that at the time of birth she is able to hold her breath in, and if she does this the birth is light and easy; but if not, then on the contrary it is painful, difficult and sorrowful: *A woman, when she is in labour, hath sorrow*.

13. Morally. The woman is the soul. The grace of the Holy Spirit is like a husband making her pregnant with blessed offspring, namely a good will and intention, and the spirit of salvation. Isaiah says:

*In thy presence, O Lord, we have conceived and been as it were in labour,*

*and have brought forth the spirit of salvation*. [cf. Is 26.11]

(a) When she has been made pregnant, the soul grows heavy, being afflicted on account of her sins. aher sight grows weak and dim, because the shine of temporal things is overcast for her. Job says:

*Let the stars be darkened with the mist thereof*. [Job 3.9]

The stars of worldly glory are obscured with mist of penance. In pregnancy the appetite grows weaker and more fastidious, and the soul, heavy with God's grace, likewise loses the appetite for evil, and frets over her past sins. So the Bride, in the Canticles, says:

*Tell my Beloved that I languish with love*. [Cant 5.8]

A man who languishes loses his appetite, and picks at his meals; so the soul which languishes with love for her Spouse is little inclined to evil, and scorns her former vices.

(b) The heart is formed first of all organs. In the heart, humility is to be noted, which chooses to make it her chief dwelling. The Lord says:

*Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart*. [Mt 11.29]

This has to be the first formed among the virtues, because it gives shape to what is out of shape. From it comes the motive force of all good work, having great dominion over the rest as the mother and root of all virtues. So Solomon says:

*A living dog is better than a dead lion*. [Eccles 9.4]

The Gloss says here that the humble publican is better than the proud Pharisee: the more he humbled himself the more he was exalted. Blessed Bernard[6] says: "The deeper you lay the foundation of humility, the higher the building rises." Humility is nobler than the other virtues, and by its nobility it bears things ignoble and wrongful. Its proper place is 'above', in the eyes, and 'in front', in bodily demeanour. So it is said of the humble

publican that;

*He would not so much as lift his eyes towards heaven; but struck his breast, saying: O God, be merciful to me a sinner*. [Lk 18.13]

(c) Just as the heart cannot feel pain or weakness, true humility cannot feel pain from an injury, or weakness in the face of another's prosperity. This is as it should be, because if humility were to be undermined, the structure of the other virtues would be cast down. St Gregory[7] says, "A man who tries to acquire virtue without humility is like a man trying to carry dust in a wind."

(d) There is no bone in the heart (except in the hearts of horses and cows). The horse represents the arrogant hypocrite, and the cow the lustful man. In the pretended humility of the hypocrite there is the bone of pride and possessiveness. He takes pride in the plumage of the ostrich, he would steal the praise of another's holiness. In the unstable humility of the lustful there is the bone of self-excuse and obstinacy. These two animals, horse and cow, can be understood as all kinds of vices.

14. (e) There follows: After the heart is formed, etc. After humility is formed in the human mind, then the upper and lower parts become distinct. The upper part is of greater dignity and is formed first, and in it appear the head and the eyes. The 'upper part' means the contemplative life, in which appears (as it should appear) the 'head' of charity. As it is said in Canticles: *His head is as the finest gold* [Cant 5.11]. Gold is pure and bright; charity should be pure as regards God, and should give light to our neighbour.

The eyes, too, appear: knowledge of eternal happiness. The 'lower part' is the active life, which should serve contemplation, for the lower exists only for the sake of the upper, as the Apostle says:

*The man was not created for the woman, but the woman for the man*, [cf. 1Cor 11.9]

because the contemplative life is not instituted for the active, but the active for the contemplative.

(f) Just as the brain, a cold organ, is placed in opposition to the heart, to temper its heat, so the contemplative life which consists in compunction of mind is placed in opposition to the active life; so that by its prayer and tears of compunction it may temper the fervour of labour and the heat of temptation, and that activity may be based on humility of heart.

And as the size of the head exceeds that of the other members, so the grace of contemplation is more sublime, being nearer to God who is contemplated. Alas! How many 'infants' (those of unstable mind) try to bear this great head, but cannot hold it up for long, because of its size! Only 'Abraham', the just man, can climb the mountain of the contemplative life with 'the boy', purity of mind. The servants remain in the valley of

worldly delights, waiting with the ass, the little she-ass of tardiness.

And as all the members have their dimensions, markings, colour, hardness and softness: so all the virtues must have their bounds, so that as they go by the royal road they may not stray to right or left. Cruelty should not justify itself under the pretext of justice, nor should carelessness and sloth hide under the cloak of mercy. They should be marked with the sign of the Lord's Passion, so that whatever we do virtuously, we should be wholly marked with the blood of the Lord's cross. Their colours should not be blurred, but true: lest vice deceive the soul by being tinted with the colour of virtue. St Isidore[8] says, "Some vices put on an appearance of virtue, and so they more perniciously deceive their followers, covering themselves with a veil of virtue." And the Philosopher[9] says, "There are no more cunningly concealed snares, than those hiding under the appearance of duty." "The Trojan horse deceived, because it counterfeited the form of Minerva." Virtues should also have hardness and softness: wine and oil, rod and manna, blows and breasts, iron and ointment.

15. (g) There follows: If the little body is to become a male, etc. 'Male', here, stands for work that is strong in virtue; 'female' for that which is weak. When the soul conceives a virtuous work, it is of a good disposition, arranging everything rightly and properly, and of a good 'colour', pleasing to God and edifying to neighbour. Pharaoh (the devil) would like to drown this 'male' in the river of Egypt, love of this world. In the first book of Kings Anna says of this 'male':

*O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt give to thy servant a man-child, I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life*. [1Kg(Sm) 1.11]

She asked for the male sex, not the female. She knew that Pharaoh had ordered that all females should be reserved for him. The 'female sex' represents the work of a weak mind. When the wretched soul conceives this, its face grows pale, being overcast by love of earthly things; and it goes with slow and faltering steps, negligent and luke-warm, lacking strength and held back from good work. This is 'the daughter of the king of Egypt' who beguiled the wisdom of Solomon, and turned away his heart to follow foreign gods [cf. 3(1)Kg 11.3-4]. Alas! How many wise men today have grown luke-warm and enfeebled in mind, to follow mortal sin! As many your mortal sins, so many the gods you adore! Blessed Bernard[10] says, "If you would be wise, but be not so to yourself, then you lack wisdom."

When 'hairs' (superfluous thoughts) arise in the mind, it brings about much discomfort; because, as Solomon says:

*Perverse thoughts separate from God*. [Wisd 1.3]

And if the pregnant woman eats salty foods, the baby's nails do not grow. Salt makes the ground sterile. Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt. The Lord said that salt which had lost its savour should be thrown out. Here, 'salt' means vainglory, which makes all works

sterile. If the soul that is about to bear the offspring should eat the salt of vainglory, her work will lack 'nails'- final perseverance and heavenly glory.

(i,j) Birds and men are curled up in the womb (or egg), with noses between knees, eyes upon knees, and ears outside. The 'nose' is discretion, the 'knees' are tears of sorrow and penitent affliction, the 'eyes' are illumination of the mind, and the 'ears' obedience to what is commanded. 'Birds' and 'men' signify the intention of a good will, which 'flies' in contemplation and 'works' in action. Job says: *Man is born to labour, and the bird to fly* [Job 5.7]. His 'nose' should be 'between his knees', so that he should proceed discreetly by the middle way, in compunction of mind and affliction of body. His 'eyes' should be 'on his knees', so that he does everything cheerfully, with an enlightened conscience, because *the Lord loves a cheerful giver* [2Cor 9.7].

(k) His 'ears' should be 'outside', so that he obeys freely. As St Gregory[11] says, "Obedience contains all the other virtues, and by containing them preserves them."

(l) This child of the soul should stretch its hands across its ribs. The ribs which protect the inner organs are lowliness and contempt for the world which protect the other virtues. The soul should stretch her 'hands' (her works) over them, and take firm hold, so as to say with Abraham:

*I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes*; [Gen 18.27]

and with David:

*After whom dost thou come out, O king of Israel? After whom dost thou pursue?*

*After a dead dog? After a flea?* [1Kg(Sm) 24.14-16]

and with the Apostle:

*The world is crucified to me*, etc. [Gal 6.14]

And when it is born, its hands go straightway to its mouth. Whoever is mindful of his birth should likewise put his hand on his mouth, lest he sin with his tongue; for as Solomon says:

*He that keepeth his lips, keepeth his soul*. [cf. Prov 21.23]

(m) When a woman is on the point of being delivered, at the moment of full-term: The woman's 'hour of birth' is, for the penitent soul, the time of confession, in which she should be sorry, and emit bitter groans, saying with the Prophet:

*I have laboured in my groanings*. [Ps 6.7]

Note that there are four things to consider in a woman giving birth: the pain, the labour, the joy of giving birth, and the duty of the mid-wife. Likewise, these things are to be considered in the penitent, who is represented as ‘a woman in labour’.

**(A sermon on confession, in which the soul should labour like a woman giving birth: *Be in pain and labour*.)**

16. The prophet Micah says of the pain and labour:

*Hast thou no king in thee, or is thy counsellor perished,*

*because sorrow hath taken thee as a woman in labour?*

*Be in pain and labour, O daughter of Sion,*

*or as a woman that bringeth forth:*

*for now thou shalt go out of the city and shalt dwell in the country*

*and shalt come even to Babylon.*

*There shalt thou be delivered:*

*there the Lord will redeem thee out of the hand of thy enemies*. [Mic 4.9-10]

Jesus Christ is the king that rules the soul, lest she go astray; the counsellor who counsels her to hope for mercy, saying, *Be in pain, O daughter of Sion* (O soul), with the pain of contrition and the labour of satisfaction, so that the penalty may be proportionate to the fault. *For now thou shalt go out of the city* (the congregation of the saints), as happens to penitents at the beginning of Lent, for the leper used to dwell apart, outside the camp [cf. Lev 13.46]. *And dwell in the country* of dissimulation, where the prodigal son wasted his father’s substance in luxurious living [cf. Lk 15.83]. You will dwell there, I say, so that you may recognise your own unlikeness to God, and receive again that likeness according to which you were made. And *come even to Babylon*, the confession of sin, so that being ashamed of it you may acknowledge it, and acknowledging weep for it, and weeping receive grace. *There shalt thou be delivered*, because (as St Augustine[12] says) "If you confess, God will forgive." There *the Lord will redeem thee out of the hand of thy enemies*, because shame for sin drives out the devil.

Concerning the joy of spiritual birth, the lord says in Luke:

*There shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that doth penance*; [Lk 15.7]

and:

*Rejoice with me, because I have found the groat which I had lost*; [Lk 15.9]

and Gabriel said of John:

*Many shall rejoice in his nativity*. [Lk 1.14]

Genesis tells how Abraham made a great feast on the day of Isaac's weaning [Gen 21.8]. When the sinner is 'weaned' and separated from the milk of worldly ways and carnal desire, 'Abraham' (God the Father) makes a great feast in heaven. So it says in Luke:

*It was fit that we should make merry and be glad; for this my son was dead and is come to life again; he was lost, and is found*. [Lk 15.32]

Of the midwife's duty (that is, the diligence of priests) Job says:

*His obstetric hand brought forth the winding serpent*. [Job 26.13]

Midwives stand by to assist in delivery. Priests are 'midwives' who should help and serve sinners to confess: that is the meaning of 'his obstetric hand'. The priest is the Lord's hand, by which he draws out the 'serpent' (the old man) from the sinner, so that afterwards he may bring the new man to birth. It is said that in some regions women give birth by producing a toad before their child: certainly a penitent does! By confession he first puts off the old man, and then he gives birth to the new man in himself. And if he wants the birth to be safe, easy and smooth, he should take care not to 'yawn'.

Someone 'yawns' if he confesses the story of his sin tepidly and as if asleep. Someone 'yawns' if he does not confess the sin he meant to confess, impeded by shame. So Isaiah says:

*The children are come to birth, and there is not the strength to bring forth*. [Is 37.3]

This happens when one's sin is on one's lips, but for embarrassment it is not disclosed in confession, so that the unhappy soul dies. If she would go through the pain and labour, without a doubt she would have joy at the birth.

But slackness and lukewarmness lead to a great excess of bad thoughts gathering in her, so that her disposition gets worse, and she strains to give birth. St Jerome[13] says, "There is always something to be done. If the hand stops, the field of our heart will be occupied by the thorns of evil thoughts." And St Isidore:[14] "Lust burns more fiercely when it finds idleness." There is, in truth, pain and labour in the soul of a real penitent, but this makes the birth light and easy. Labour consumes the excess, and it comes out

of those who perspire freely. So the Lord said in Genesis:

*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread*. [Gen 3.19]

Your 'face' is whatever shows the intention of your mind. In the face of a true penitent there shows the pain of contrition, and tears of bitterness flow like the sweat of the body; and in that is the penitent's food and refreshment.

So the words are well said*: A woman, when she is in labour, hath sorrow; but when she hath brought forth the child, she remembereth no more the anguish for joy*, the joy of eternal glory. Isaiah says:

*The former distresses are forgotten*

*and they shall not be in remembrance,*

*and they shall not come upon the heart.*

*But you shall be glad and rejoice for ever*. [Is 65.16-18]

To that joy, from the sorrows of this world, may he deign to lead us, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] BERNARD, *In canticis sermo* 13,7; PL 183.837-838

[2] cf. CICERO, *De officiis*, II,12

[3] ascribed to SOCRATES

[4] cf. GREGORY, *Moralia*, V,11,22 and III,7,1; PL 75.690-691 and 603-604

[5] Most of the information that follows is drawn from Aristotle, *Historia animalium*, VII*;*

*De partibus animalium*, III; and *De generatione animalium*, II

[6] More likely AUGUSTINE, *De Scripturis, sermo* 49,1,2; PL 38.441

[7] GREGORY, *In Evangelia hom*. 7,4; PL 76.1103

[8] ISIDORE, *Sententiarum* II,35,1; PL 83.636

[9] CICERO, *In Verrem*, act. 2, I,15; *Pro Muraena* 37,78

[10] BERNARD, *De consideratione*, II,3,6; PL 182.745

[11] GREGORY, *Moralia* XXXV,14,28; PL 76.765

[12] AUGUSTINE *De Scripturis, sermo* 113,2; PL 38.649

[13] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Prov 24.27

[14] ISIDORE, *Synonymorum* II,18; PL 83.849

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

**(The Gospel for the fourth Sunday after Easter: *I go to him that sent me*; which is divided into three clauses)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for the prelate of the Church, on how he should labour in the field of the faithful: *The husbandman waiteth*.)**

1. At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: *I go to him that sent me, and none of you asketh me: Whither goest thou*. [Jn 16.5]

James says in the canonical Epistle:

*The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth; patiently bearing till he receive the early and latter rain*. [Jas 5.7]

The farmer tilling the ground is the preacher, who in the sweat of his brow and with the hoe of the word cultivates the field- the souls of the faithful. The word ‘field’ can indicate any area of work. It may be sown, or forested with trees, or given over to flocks, or even made colourful with flowers. There is always something to do in the soul, lest what Solomon warns of in Proverbs should happen: *I passed by the field of the slothful man... and behold, it was all filled with thorns* [cf. Prov 24.30-31]. The prickly thorns of evil thoughts very quickly spring up where there is sloth and idleness; so the soul should be sown with the trees of virtue, the flocks of eternal life should graze there and it should be made bright with all sorts of flowers, the examples of the saints. If that is how the field is cultivated, the Lord will say of it:

*Behold, the smell of my son is as the smell of a plentiful field, which the Lord hath blessed*. [Gen 27.27]

So, *the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth*; and the preacher who cultivates the Lord’s field waits for the fruit of his earth, eternal life. Through Jeremiah, the Lord promises the preacher:

*If thou wilt be converted, I will convert thee;*

*and if thou wilt separate the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth*. [Jer 15.19]

If you will be converted (or if, as St James says, *You convert a sinner from the error of his way* [Jas 5.20]), I will convert you by the infusion of grace; and if you separate the precious (the soul, which I have purchased with my precious Blood) from the vile (sin, vilest of all things), you will be as my mouth, because through you I will judge the wicked in the regeneration. Meanwhile, all is to be done patiently: so he adds, *patiently bearing till he receive the early and latter rain*. The early rains are those that come when growth is beginning; the latter, those when growth is complete. If the preacher endures patiently and joyfully when he experiences various trials, he will receive the early rain of grace here below, and the latter rain of glory hereafter. This is what our Lord refers to when he says in today's Gospel: *I go to him that sent me*.

2. There are three things to note in this Gospel. The first is the return of Jesus Christ to his Father, beginning: *I go to him that sent me*. The second is the conviction of the world of sin and justice, continuing: *When he is come he will convince the world*, etc. The third is the inspiration of the Spirit of Truth, adding: *I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of Truth, comes, he will teach you all truth*. On this and next Sunday the canonical Epistles are read. The Introit of this Sunday's Mass is: *Sing to the Lord a new song*; and the Epistle of blessed James is read: *Every best gift*; which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the aforesaid three clauses of the Gospel. The first is: *Every best gift*; the second is: *You know, my dearest brethren*; the third is: *Wherefore, casting away all uncleanness*, etc.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon for the Annunciation, Nativity or Passion of the Lord: *I will put a ring in thy nose*; and: *Canst thou put a ring?)***

3. Let us say, then: *I go to him that sent me*.

A little earlier, the Lord had said:

*Where I go you know, and the way you know. Thomas saith to him: Lord, we know not whither thou goest*. [Jn 14.4-5]

A little later, he added:

*I go to him that sent me... I came forth from the Father and I am come into the world; again, I leave the world and go to the Father*. [Jn 16.5,28]

This is the circle of which the Father said in Isaiah (threatening the devil):

*I will put a ring in thy nose and a bit between thy lips,*

*and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest*. [Is 37.29]

The ring or circle, which returns to its starting point, stands for Jesus Christ who, like a circle, returns whence he came out. He came out from the Father, took his course even to hell, and returned to the throne of God. Thus the ring is put in the nose of the devil, because the Wisdom of God was made flesh to teach us the true wisdom, and so by the wisdom he taught us to bring to nought the deceits of the devil. The devils 'nostrils' are the ways by which his spirit or breath flows out, his crafty snares. The devil sniffs out and smells, in outward things and in the human heart, as if by his 'nose', the vices to which each one is prone; and there he sets his traps. But, taught by God's wisdom, each of us (if he will) can avoid these traps.

*And I will put a bit between thy lips*. The 'bit' is the Cross of Jesus Christ, which (like the bridle in a horses mouth) prevents the devil from devouring us as he used to. There is a **concordance** in Job:

*Canst thou put a ring in his nose, or bore through his jaw with a buckle?* [Job 40.21]

The buckle, or bracelet which strengthens the arm, is the Cross of Jesus Christ, of which Isaiah says:

*And the government is upon his shoulder*. [Is 9.6]

With this armlet the Son of God pierced the devil's cheek and freed the human race from his jaws. So the text goes on: *And I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest*. He lost his dominion by the same way in which he usurped the lordship of the world. Just as he deceived a man and a woman with the forbidden tree and a serpent, so by a man (Jesus Christ) and a woman (the blessed Virgin), by the tree of the Cross and by the 'serpent' (the death of Christ according to the flesh, signified by the serpent which Moses lifted up on the wood in the desert), the devil lost his dominion over the human race. And so, when the business of our salvation was accomplished, Christ said*: I go to him that sent me*.

There is a **concordance** to this in Tobias, where Raphael bound the demon and enlightened the eyes of Tobias, saying:

*It is time that I return to him that sent me*. [Tob 12.20]

Raphael means 'medicine of God'. He is Jesus Christ, who made an ointment out of the 'serpent' of his flesh, nailed to the Cross; and who bound the devil and enlightened the eyes of the human race. Then he said: *It is time that I return to him that sent me*; or: *I go to him that sent me*.

4. The Father sent us his Son, the best gift and the perfect gift, regarding which there is a **concordance** in today's Epistle of blessed James: *Every best gift and every perfect gift*, etc. Best means supreme, and perfect is that to which nothing can be added. Christ is the 'best gift', because he is given us by the Father, whose supreme and co-eternal Son he is. It says in the second book of Kings:

*And there was a third battle in Gob against the Philistines, in which Adeodatus the son of Forest, an embroiderer of Bethlehem, slew Goliath the Gethite*. [2Kg(Sm) 21.19]

'Adeodatus', literally, is David, who was given by God to the people of Israel. He is 'son of Forest', because in the forest he tended his father's sheep, according to the words:

*He brought him from following the ewes great with young*. [Ps 77.70]

He is an 'embroiderer', because his mother was of the family of Bezaleel, who (as Exodus tells) was an embroiderer, a maker of clothes, clothes of many colours. He is a Bethlehemite, because Bethlehem was to be his birthplace.

Allegorically. *There was a third battle in Gob*, etc. The devil fought three battles against the Lord: in heaven, when by pride he sought to usurp the excellence of the divinity; in paradise, when with the blandishments of false promises and to the injury of the Creator he deceived our first parents; in the world, when he tempted the God-man himself in the desert and caused him to be nailed to the Cross. It is of this battle that it says, *There was a third battle in Gob*, which means 'pit', the world in which there is *the pit of misery and the mire of dregs* [Ps 39.3]. The word means a place of stagnant water that does not flow. This world is the place of waters (pride, lust and avarice) which never flow out, but mount up every day. Here David ('merciful') is Jesus Christ, whose mercies are without number, who was given to us simply by the mercy of the Father, and who is 'every best gift'. He slew Goliath the Gethite, Goliath meaning 'changing' and Geth, 'fearful': the devil who *transformeth himself into an angel of light* [2Cor 11.14], because he is afraid to be caught in his own form. Our David slew him when he took away from him the dominion of this world, and shut him in the prison of hell.

He is 'son of Forest', a forest being a place where trees spring up. The 'forest' means the ancient fathers, patriarchs and prophets, who (like trees springing up) inspired by the spirit of God prophesied about the Incarnation of the Son of God. From their race he took flesh, and so he is called 'son of Forest'.

He is called an 'embroiderer'. An embroidered garment is made by needle-work. A needle has two ends, one with a sharp point, the other with an 'eye'. The sharp point is Christ's divinity, the 'eye' is his humanity. He himself says of this needle that a camel cannot pass through the needle's eye. The humped camel (the rich and wealthy man) cannot pass through the eye of the needle (the poverty of Jesus Christ). Alternatively, the 'eye' is the mildness and mercy he showed in his first coming, and the point is the sharpness of justice with which he will pierce us in the Judgement. With this needle, the

embroiderer makes a coat of many colours, patterned with all kinds of virtues, for the faithful soul. So it says in Proverbs:

*She hath made herself clothing of tapestry;*

*fine linen and purple is her covering*. [Prov 31.22]

The clothing of tapestry is of many and varied colours. The raiment of the faithful is the fine linen of chastity and the purple of the Lord's Passion.

He is also called a 'Bethlehemite'. Bethlehem means 'house of bread'. He feeds us in the Church with the bread of his Body: *the bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world*. [Jn 6.52]

Alternatively. Jesus Christ was 'given by God' in his Nativity*: A child is born to us, and a son is given to us*. He was 'son of Forest' in his preaching and in his Passion: in his preaching, because he chose the Apostles as trees springing up on high:

*I have chosen you, that you should go and should bring forth fruit*. [Jn 15.16]

In his Passion, because he was crowned with the thorns of our sins. He was an 'embroiderer' in his Resurrection; there, with the needle of his power and wisdom, he mended and restored to immortality the coat of many colours, his glorious flesh which he took from the virgin Mary and which was stretched out for us on the wood of the Cross, wounded with nails and pierced with the lance. He will be a 'Bethlehemite' to us in eternal blessedness, where we shall be satisfied when we see him face to face [cf. 1Cor 13.12]. Well said then, 'Every best gift'. The Father of lights, like a kind and generous almsgiver, has given us (poor as we are) not just the good, or even the better, but the very best.

5. There follows: *And every perfect gift*. The Apostle says:

*With him, he hath given us all things*; [cf. Rom 8.32]

and again:

*He hath given him head of the Church*. [cf. Eph 1.22]

The Gloss says, "He could not give a greater gift." Christ is rightly called 'every perfect gift', because when the Father gave him to us he brought everything to perfection in him. Whence:

*The Son of man is come to save that which was lost*. [Mt 18.11]

And that is why the Church sings today in the Introit of the Mass:

*Sing to the Lord a new song*, [Ps 97.1]

as if to say, O faithful people, saved and renewed by the Son of man, sing a new song. You should cast away the old, the new is coming in [cf. Lev 26.10]. Sing, I say, because the Lord, the Father, has done marvellous things. He has sent his Son, every best gift. *He hath revealed his justice in the sight of the Gentiles* [Ps 97.2], since he has given us his Only-begotten, every perfect gift, who justifies the nations and brings all things to perfection.

So it is well said: *Every perfect gift*. In six days he made everything*, he spoke and they were made* [Ps 148.5]. In the sixth age the Word was made flesh [Jn 1.14], and on the sixth day, at the sixth hour, he suffered for us and so brought all things to completion; saying on the Cross*: It is consummated* [Jn 16.30]. As great as the distance between saying and doing, is the distance between creating and re-creating. Creation was light and easy, it was achieved by a mere word: that is, by God's will alone, for to him to will is to do. But re-creation was very difficult, by means of his Passion and death. Adam was created easily, and fell very easily. Woe to us wretches! We have been re-created and redeemed by so great a Passion, so much anguish and pain: yet how easily we sin, and how gravely, and make of no effect that great labour of the Lord.

He himself says, in Isaiah:

*I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength without cause and in vain*. [Is 69.4]

God did not labour in creation: *Whatever he willed, he did* [Ps 134.6]. But he laboured so greatly in re-creation that

*His sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground*. [Lk 22.44]

If he had such anguish in his prayer, how much do you think he had in his crucifixion? The Lord laboured, and by labouring he rescued us from the hand of the devil. But we sin mortally, and fall into the devil's hand, and so (insofar as we can) we make the Lord's labour vain. So he says*, I have laboured in vain*, without cause, without usefulness for anyone. I see no profit in my Passion, because:

*There is none that doth good, no, not one*. [Ps 13.1]

*Cursing and lying and killing and theft and adultery have overflowed;*

*and blood hath touched blood*. [Hos 4.2]

Jeremiah says:

*The priests did not say: Where is the Lord?*

*And they that held the law knew me not,*

*and the pastors* (prelates) *transgressed against me,*

*and the prophets* (preachers) *prophesied in Baal*. [Jer 2.8]

(that is, ‘in the master’; they preach so as to show their superiority.) So the Lord said well*, I have laboured in vain, without a cause, and I have spent my strength in vain*. The strength of his divinity was as it were spent in the weakness of his humanity. Does it not seem to you that his strength was spent, when he, God and man, was bound to the pillar like a criminal and scourged with whips? When he was struck with blows, smeared with spittle and had his beard pulled? When the head before which angels tremble was struck with a reed, and when he was crucified between two thieves? Woe to those wretches, vain and mad, who are not drawn back by these things from worldly vanity! He spent his strength in vain, because those for whom he spent it are become vain! It is much to be feared that, just as at the beginning he said, *It repenteth me that I have made man* [Gen 6.7], he will now say, "*It repenteth me* that I have redeemed man, for I have spent my strength, but their evil-doing is not spent."

**(A sermon on the Passion of the Lord: *The bellows have failed in the fire*.)**

6. So Jeremiah says:

*The bellows have failed in the fire, the lead is consumed,*

*the founder hath melted in vain; for their wicked deeds are not consumed.*

*Call them reprobate silver, for the Lord hath rejected them*. [Jer 6.29-30]

In this text, note five things: the founder, the bellows, the fire, the lead and the silver. The founder is the Divine nature, the bellows is preaching, the fire is the Passion, the lead is Jesus Christ’s humanity, and the silver is our soul.

In a furnace of fire, silver is purified and made bright with lead. To purify silver of dross (that is, to purify our souls from evil) God and man and his preaching come together. But the founder melts in vain, and consumes his strength in vain. The bellows failed and the lead was consumed in the fire of his Passion, and so he laboured for no cause and in vain because our malice was not consumed. So the reprobate silver is cast on the dung-heap of Gehenna, the souls of men are put in the lake of burning fire. Hosea says:

*Nettles shall inherit their beloved silver, the burr shall be in their tabernacles*. [Hos 9.6]

The stinging nettle is the fire of hell, and the clinging burr is the inescapable punishment with which the souls of the wicked will be tormented, because they would not receive the perfect gift of God, of which is said, *Every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights*, like a ray from the sun. Just as the sun's ray coming down from the sun enlightens the world, and yet never departs from the sun: so the Son of God coming down from the Father enlightens the world, and yet never leaves the Father because he is one with the Father. As he himself says in John, *I and the Father are one* [Jn 10.30].

St John Damascene[1] says, "The Word is incarnate, yet does not lose its proper incorporeality; so that it is both wholly incarnate and wholly unlimited. Corporeally, it is lessened and contracted; divinely, it is unbounded. The flesh is not extended, nor is the divinity circumscribed. He was in all things and above all things, yet he dwelt in the womb of the Holy Mother." St Augustine[2] says, "When we read, *The Word was made flesh*, we acknowledge in the Word the true Son of God, and in the flesh the true Son of man; and in both together we acknowledge but one Person, God and man, joined by the gift of an inexpressible grace." It is well said, then,

*Coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change nor shadow of alteration*. [Jas 1.17]

There is no alteration in God, so that at one time he gives good things, and at another time evil; or that he gives good with a certain admixture of evil. In his nature there is no mutability: it is always one and the same, not just in nature but also in the distribution of gifts, because he sends out only gifts of light, not shadows that deceive. So there is added:

*Of his own will hath he begotten us* (who were children of darkness, by the water of regeneration, so as to be children of light)

*by the word of truth* (the teaching of the Gospel)

*to the end that we might be some beginning of his creature*; (because now there begins to be the principle of renewal, and there will be full renewal in the future).

Alternatively, according to another translation: *that we might be the first-fruits of his creation*.

Alternatively, he begot us by the word of truth, that we might begin to groan by contrition, bring forth by confession (because, as the Apostle says: *Every creature groaneth and travaileth even till now* [Rom 8.22]), that afterwards we may rejoice with the Son of God, who said: *I go to him that sent me*.

**(On the nature of the turtle-dove and what it signifies, and on the two-fold**

**inheritance of Jesus Christ.)**

7. Christ did as the turtle-dove does. In winter-time it comes down to the valleys and lives in the hollow trunks of trees, having moulted its plumage. In spring it returns to the mountains. So Christ, in the winter of faithlessness and the cold of the devil's persecution, came down into the womb of the most lowly Virgin, and dwelt in this world as poor and abject (like a bird without its plumage). Of this turtle-dove Solomon says in the Canticles:

*The voice of the turtle is heard in our land*. [Cant 2.12]

The voice of the turtle is groaning and weeping. Christ came down to groan and weep (for we never hear of him laughing), to teach us to groan and weep. *The voice of the turtle*, then*, is heard in our land*: *Do penance*! [Mt 3.2]. But when summer drew near, and the cruel persecution of the Jews grew hot, and the heat of the Passion blazed up, then he returned to the mountain, his Father, saying*: I go to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me: Whither goest thou?* Let us ask Christ by what way he goes to the Father. He will reply, "By the way of the Cross!" So he himself says in Luke:

*Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into his glory?* [Lk 24.26]

Christ had a double inheritance: one from his Mother, labour and sorrow; the other from his Father, joy and rest. So we, his co-heirs, should seek that double inheritance. We go astray when we want to have the second without the first, because the Lord established the second in the first, lest we look for the one without the other. He grafted the tree of life onto the tree of knowledge of good and evil, when the Word was made flesh. Whence:

*He shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters*. [Ps 1.3]

And Isaiah:

*Founding the earth and planting the heavens*. [Is 51.16]

In the earth of humanity, founded upon the seven pillars of sevenfold grace, he planted the heaven of divinity. Let us take possession of the first inheritance which Jesus Christ left to us, that we may be found fit to attain the second.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A sermon against worldlings: *When the Paraclete is come*.)**

8. There follows, secondly:

*When the Paraclete is come, he will convince the world of sin and of justice and of judgement. Of sin; because they believed not in me. And of justice; because I go to the Father, and you shall see me no longer. And of judgement; because the prince of this world is already judged*. [Jn 16.8-11]

The world is in movement. No rest is granted to its elements. In Greek, the world is the 'cosmos', and man is called a 'microcosm', a little world. Just as the world is made up of the four elements, so man consists of four 'humours', mixed into one 'temperament' (or so the ancients taught). In this passage, the 'world' means worldly people, always 'in a whirl'. So, in his canonical Epistle, St Jude says of them:

*These are... clouds without water, which are carried about by the winds; trees of autumn, unfruitful, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out of their own confusion; wandering stars, to whom the storm of darkness is reserved for ever*. [Jude 1.12-13]

Note four things in this text: clouds, trees, waves and stars. In these four, the four vices of worldly folk are comprised, namely: pride, avarice, lust and hypocrisy.

'Clouds' are light in weight, dark in hue, and they represent the proud. Light minded, yet darkened in mind, they are borne about by various sins, lacking the water of compunction and the light of sevenfold grace. The Prophet says of them:

*O my God, make them like a wheel: and as stubble before the wind*. [Ps 82.14]

Note these two, wheel and stubble. The wheel turns, the stubble burns. God makes the proud a wheel, letting them turn from sin to sin; and afterwards he makes them like stubble before the wind, because like stubble parched of the moisture of grace, they will be burnt in the fire of eternal punishment.

'Autumn trees', unfruitful, are the avaricious, who *uselessly cumber the ground* [Lk 13.7]. The Lord curses them like a tree on which he finds no fruit [cf. Mt 11.21]. Note these four: autumn, unfruitful, twice-dead, rooted up. In autumn the wind blows away the leaves. The avaricious are autumn trees, and when the wind of death blows they are despoiled of the leaves of riches, with which they were adorned and clothed. Being unfruitful, they are cast into eternal fire; for:

*Every tree that doth not yield good fruit shall be cut down, and cast into the fire*. [Mt 3.10]

They are twice-dead, buried in soul and body in hell; rooted up from the land of the living.

'Raging waves of the sea' are the lustful. They are called 'waves' because they are tossed about by the blasts of the wind. The lustful are tossed about by the suggestions of the unclean spirits, they rise and fall with various thoughts, and foam with lust to the

confusion of their souls. They behave like a pot put on the fire, that foams and boils over. The pot is the sinner's heart, holding the water of carnal desire. When the fire of diabolical temptation is applied to it, it foams with lust, to their own confusion.

'Wandering stars' are hypocrites and false religious. Sailors observe the stars and set their course by them. Good prelates of the Church and true religious are *stars shining in a dark place* [cf. 2Pt 1.19], and by them those who sail this world's sea rightly direct their course to the harbour of eternal life. But hypocrites and false religious are 'wandering stars', a cause of shipwreck to others, and so they are themselves cast down by the storm and tempest of death.

**(On wind-eggs and their different shapes, and on the nature of the partridge, and what all these things signify.)**

9. All these kind of people are like 'wind-eggs', that hatch no chicks. It is said that hen-partridges are so excited by lust that if the males blow a breath at them, the very scent makes them pregnant, and they produce eggs that do not hatch. All these eggs are 'wind-eggs'. The partridge is a deceitful and unclean bird, and it stands for the sinners we have mentioned who (as Peter says) *have eyes full of adultery and of sin that ceaseth not* [2Pt 2.14], and by the breath of the devil's suggestions they conceive eggs of wind, the love of worldly vanity. Hosea says:

*They have sown wind and reaped a whirlwind.*

*There is no standing stalk in them, nor does it yield meal*. [Hos 8.7]

Those who sow the wind of worldly love will without doubt reap the whirlwind of eternal death. The stalk, the sharp ear, is contrition of heart which pierces the sinner and produces the flour of confession. This stalk does not stand, and it does not produce meal in sinners, because they do not engender 'chicks', the works of eternal life, but only the wind of worldly vanity.

Note that eggs differ in shape, some being narrow and some wide. The wide are produced first, then the narrow. Long pointed eggs produce males; the round sort, which have round and not pointed ends, produce females[3] . By this means it is easy to tell which eggs will produce males and which females. Similarly the devil, observing the 'pointedness' or 'roundness', sees in human beings which are manly and which womanish. By 'pointedness' I mean compunction and the contemplation of heavenly things; by 'roundness', delight in the flesh and the pursuit of worldly things. So we read:

*I have gone round the earth and walked through it*. [Job 1.7]

*He goeth round like a lion, seeking whom he may devour*. [1Pt 5.8]

So he says in Isaiah:

*My hand hath found the strength of the people as a nest:*

*and as eggs are gathered that are left so have I gathered all the earth.*

*And there was none that moved the wing* (of virtue),

*or opened the mouth* (by confession),

*or made the least noise* (by inner compunction). [Is 10.14]

'Males' (just men, contrite of heart, intent on contemplation) do not behave like this; but 'females' (worldly people, enfeebled with transitory things) do. It is to them that the words apply:

*When the Paraclete comes, he will convince the world*, etc.

*Paraclesis* is the Greek for 'comfort', so the Paraclete is the Comforter, whose comfort worldly folk will not receive, because they have their own comfort. The Lord says of them:

*Woe to you... for you have your consolation*; [Lk 6.24]

and Isaiah:

*Are not you wicked children, a false seed,*

*who seek your comfort in idols and under every green tree?* [Is 57.4-5]

Worldly folk are wicked children by pride, and a false seed by lust. They are comforted in the idols of avarice (which is idolatry) under every green tree, the glory of temporal things.

**(A sermon against fornicators and drunkards, and how they lose heart and faith: *Fornication and wine and drunkenness take away the heart*.)**

10. *When the Paraclete comes, he will convince the world of sin* (which it has), *and of justice* (which it does not have), *and of judgement* (which it does not fear).

Note these three: sin, justice and judgement. The Latin '*peccator'* (sinner) may have been connected with the word for a concubine or prostitute, and may have referred to those who commit fornication; but what was anciently a word for profligates later became a term for all wicked people. More than by any other vice, the world is defiled by

fornication. Hosea says:

*They have committed fornication and have not ceased:*

*because they have forsaken the Lord in not observing his law.*

*Fornication and wine and drunkenness take away the heart*. [Hos 4.10]

There are three things to note in the heart: indignation, the seat of wisdom, and love. The heart is a noble organ, which feels indignation and will not let what is unclean enter it. But fornication makes it lose that indignation, and lets it swallow that morsel. Again, the heart is the seat of wisdom, but wine causes it to lose this. Similarly, it is by the heart that we love; but he who is drunk with the desire for temporal things and will not help his neighbour, loses this love. It is obvious that fornication takes away the heart, from the case of Solomon who worshipped idols. The Apostle says:

*With the heart we believe unto justice*, [Rom 10.10)

but fornication takes away the heart wherein is faith.

So by fornication faith is lost, and that is why it is called ‘for-nication’, *formae necatio*, the killing of the soul formed in God’s likeness. Faith is the life of the soul. The Apostle says*: Let Christ dwell in your hearts by faith* [Eph 3.17], but fornication takes away the heart, in which is life, and so the soul dies- for when the cause ceases, so does the effect. So the Lord says:

*Of sin, because they have not believed in me*.

The Paraclete, through the ministers of preaching, convicts the world of the sin of fornication.

**(A sermon on the justice of the saints: *And of justice*.)**

11. *And of justice*. Justice is that by which, by a right judgement, to each is given his own ‘as of right’. Justice is a habit of mind, for the service of the common good, to give to each what he deserves. The parts of justice are: to fear God, to respect religious observance, piety, humanity, delight in what is right and good, hatred of evil, taking care to give thanks. The world does not have this justice, because it does not fear God, it dishonours religion, it hates the good and it is ungrateful to God*. Of justice*, which it does not perform because it does not punish itself as justice demands for the sins it has committed. *Of justice*: the world is proved wrong not by its own justice, but by that of believers, by comparison with which it is condemned. So he does not say: *The world will not see me*, but: *You will not see me*, you the Apostles. This is against worldly folk, who say, "How shall we believe what we do not see?" The real justice, the faith that justifies,

is to believe what is not seen.

Alternatively, *He will refute the world about the justice* of the saints. Thus the Lord says by Zechariah:

*The building-line shall be stretched forth upon Jerusalem*. [Zech 1.16]

A building-line is a mason's tool, which hangs down perpendicularly. It is a stone or piece of lead suspended on a thread, by which walls are aligned. The justice of the saints is like a plumb-line set against 'Jerusalem' (any faithful soul), whereby it may form and measure its life against their ex-ample. Every time we celebrate the feasts of the saints, we are applying this plumb-line to the lives of sinners. We celebrate their feasts, so as to receive from their lives a pattern of living. How ridiculous, to want to honour the saints on their days with eating, when we know that they got to heaven by fasting! If we do not imitate the saints, but rather love the world and its glory; if we pamper our bodies with pleasure and amass money: then their justice will prove that we ought to be condemned.

**(A sermon on judgement, in which six persons are sought: *And of judgement*.)**

12. *And of judgement*. Note that six persons are involved in every judgement; the judge, the prosecutor, the criminal and three witnesses. The judge is the priest, the sinner is both prosecutor and criminal (since he should accuse himself of his sins), and the three witnesses are contrition, confession and satisfaction (which bear witness that the sinner is truly penitent). St Augustine[4] says: "Enter, man, into the tribunal of your conscience. Let reason be the judge and your deeds be the witnesses." Worldly people, who do not want to undergo this judgement, will accordingly be judged with their prince, the devil (who is judged already), in the assize of the Last Judgement; and they will be condemned with an irrevocable sentence.

James the Apostle, to teach such folk to avoid sin, to love justice and to fear judgement, says in the second part of today's Epistle:

*You know, my dearest brethren. And let every man be swift to hear, but slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man worketh not the justice of God*. [Jas 1.19-20]

Every man should be swift to hear what the Apostle says: *Fly fornication* [1Cor 6.18].

**(A sermon against the gluttonous and lustful: *If thou wilt hearken to me, there shall not be*.)**

13. The Lord says in the Psalm:

*If thou wilt hearken to me, there shall be no new god in thee;*

*neither shalt thou adore a strange god*. [Ps 80.9-10]

The ‘new god’ is the belly, which is always looking for something new. This god is in those of whom the Apostle says:

*Whose god is their belly; and whose glory is their shame; who mind earthly things*. [Phil 3.19]

The ‘strange god’ is lust, which estranges man from God. This is the god Beelphegor (‘ancient devourer’). It is lust, the old evil, the ancient disease, which devours everything good. There is a **concordance** to this in the book of Numbers:

*The people committed fornication with the daughters of Moab, who called them to their sacrifices; and they ate of them, and adored their gods. And Israel was initiated to Beelphegor. Upon which the Lord being angry said to Moses: Take all the princes of the people, and hang them up on gibbets against the sun: that my fury may be turned away from Israel*. [Num 25.1-4]

The daughters of Moab (‘from the father’) are greed and lust and the other vices which come from the devil as father, and with them all worldly people commit fornication. They eat and adore their gods, being given up to greed and lust. Therefore the princes of the people must be hung on gibbets. The princes of the people are the five bodily senses, which must be hung on the gibbet of penitence for what they have done. And this must be ‘against the sun’, the sun being the worldly glory in opposition to which we must take our stand by works of penitence, because we have sinned.

Alternatively, *against the sun* means that if we have sinned openly, we should do penance openly. On this text, *Take all the princes*, we have Origen[5] , who introduces this text and applies it to the angels, saying: "If an angel hopes for a reward (having received us as a trust from God) for what we have done well, he fears to be blamed for what we have done ill. So he is said to be exposed ‘against the sun’, so that it may be clear by whose fault it was committed, whereby we are consecrated to Beelphegor, or any idol, according to the type of sin. If a ‘prince’ (someone’s guardian angel) was not at fault, but gave me reminders of good, and spoke in my heart at least, so that I was aware of him recalling me from my sin; and I spurned his warnings and the restraint of conscience, and rushed into sin: then my punishment will be double, for despising the guardian as well as for the sin committed. Do not wonder, if angels come with men to judgement. The Lord himself will come to judgement with the princes of his people."

He also says, on the same text[6] : "According to the Apocalypse of John, an angel presided generally over each Church, who will be either praised for the good deeds of the people, or blamed for the sins of the people. I am moved to wonder at this amazing mystery, that God cares so much for us that he even blames his angels on our account, and lets them be put to shame. For when a child is entrusted to a tutor, the tutor gets the

blame if the child acquires bad habits (unless the child is hard, obstinate and pleasure-seeking, and ignores the tutor's good advice). Isaiah tells us what will happen to his soul: *The daughter of Sion shall be left as a covert in a vineyard* [Is 1.8]." And he adds, "God cares more for the soul's salvation than the devil does for its perdition."

**(On the disposition of the ear and the tongue, and what they signify: *Let every man be swift*.)**

14. *Let every man*, then, *be swift to hear*. By nature every man should be swift to hear, for the ear is an organ that rapidly seizes and draws in sound. There is no flesh at the back of the head, nor brain; and the organ of hearing is at the back of the head. This is only right, because the back of the head is empty, full of air, and air is the instrument of hearing. So man hears swiftly, if there is no impediment. Likewise in the head (i.e. the mind) in which there is no 'flesh' of self-will, but the 'air' of a devout mind, the voice of obedience passes swiftly in. So it is said:

*At the hearing of the ear they have obeyed me*; [Ps 17.45]

and Samuel says in the first book of Kings:

*Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth*. [1Kg(Sm) 3.10]

And so that obedience may penetrate more rapidly, it is fitting that it should be 'airy', pure and perceptive of heavenly things, and having nothing earthly about it. So *let every man be swift to hear*.

*And slow to speak*. Nature itself teaches that this is so, because it has enclosed the tongue by a kind of double door, so that it may not wander freely. Nature has put two sets of doors in front of the tongue, the teeth and the lips, to indicate that no word should go forth without great care. The man who said:

*I have set a watch on my mouth, and a door round about my lips*, [Ps 140.3]

closed those two doors discreetly. And he is right to say, *a door round about*, because he should avoid not just wrong words, but what is 'round about' wrong words. For instance, there are people who would be ashamed to tell lies about another, but they do not mind running them down under a cloak of faint praise, and (worse still) they even do this in confession.

And note that the door of the lips, not just of the teeth, should be closed. A person closes the door of both teeth and lips when he refrains from both detraction and flattery. But the tongue (which James calls *an unquiet evil, full of deadly poison* [Jas 3.8], *and a fire that kindles the wood of virtue and inflames the wheel of our nativity* [ibid. 5,6]) breaks both the first and the second door, and goes like a harlot into the street, *talkative and*

*wandering, not bearing to be quiet* [Prov 7.8,10,11], and disturbing everything. St Bernard[7] says of it: "Who can count how many defilements this little member, the tongue, attracts? How manifold the uncleanness tangled in uncircumcised lips, how great the harm done by an unchecked mouth? No-one can reckon of little account the time wasted in idle chatter. *This is*, indeed, *the acceptable time, the day of salvation*: yet words escape and cannot be recalled, and time flies and cannot be mended, and the fool does not even notice what he is losing. Let us talk together, they say, at least for an hour: but the Creator's grace gave you that time to gain pardon, to seek grace, to do penance and to earn glory." He says again: "You should not be afraid to say that a gossip's tongue is crueller than the blade which pierced the Lord's side. It enters Christ's body, not when it already dead, but to cause death. The thorns that pierced his head, the nails that pierced his hands and feet, were not more hurtful" than the tongue of a slanderer, which pierces the very heart. The Philosopher[8] says: "Do not speak what is disgraceful: little by little words destroy shame." "Sometimes I regret speaking, but never being silent." "Use your ears more often than your tongue." So *let every man be slow to speak*, and then he will be able to imitate the justice of the saints; for as James says:

*If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man*. [Jas 3.2]

**(A sermon against the wrathful: *And slow to anger*.)**

And slow to anger, which obscures the mind so that it does not see what is true. The Philosopher[9] says of it: "The less you repress anger, the more you will be pressed by anger." "The angry man, when he stops being angry, is angry with himself." "Anger is not accustomed to respect anything." So it is well said:

*The anger of man worketh not the justice of God*.

So let every man be slow to anger, or else on the Day of Wrath he will receive with the devil the irrevocable sentence of damnation.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the coming of the Holy Spirit: *An angel of the Lord descended into the pond*.)**

15. There follows, thirdly:

*But when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will teach you all truth*. [Jn 16.13]

When the temptress of souls (the pleasure of the flesh and the vanity of the world) deludes the unhappy soul with false delights, she overturns the mind, as the book of Wisdom says:

*The bewitching of vanity obscureth good things,*

*and the wandering of concupiscence overturneth the mind*. [Wisd 4.12]

'Bewitching' means flattery, or deceiving with praise; the bewitching of vanity is the praise of flattery or the deceitfulness of worldly prosperity, which obscures spiritual goods. The wandering of carnal concupiscence overturns the mind. But when the Spirit of truth comes, enlightening the heart of man, he teaches all truth and drives out all that is false. So John says:

*An angel of the Lord descended... into the pond and the water was moved... and one person was made whole*. [cf. Jn 5.4]

When the angel of the Lord (the grace of the Holy Spirit) comes down into the pond (the heart of the sinner), the mind is moved with the water of compunction, and one person is healed: the true penitent who is 'one', undivided in heart and voice. So *when the Spirit of truth comes he will teach* (that is, inspire you with) *all truth*. Just as generation cannot take place without an active element, so man cannot do anything good without the Spirit of truth.

**(On the property of the palm-tree.)**

16. The female palm tree cannot make fruit unless it receives a vapour, blown by the wind, from another palm tree which is male. Ecclesiasticus says:

*I was exalted like a palm-tree in Cades* [Ecclus 24.18]

(meaning 'changed'), because a man cannot make progress without the grace of the Holy Spirit, just as a palm-tree cannot bear fruit without the vapour of its male. So a man without grace is not apt for divine service, and is like a man with no testicles, unable to beget good works.

**(Against those who have unformed grace: *Every beast that hath bruised*; and on the shoot grafted into a tree.)**

Leviticus says of this:

*You shall not offer the Lord any beast that hath the testicles bruised, or crushed, or cut and taken away*. [Lev 22.24]

The man with 'bruised or crushed testicles' is the man who has grace, but unformed, so that he cannot generate. The man whose testicles are 'cut and taken away' has neither formed nor unformed grace.

But, *When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will teach you all things*. The third part of today's Epistle is **concordant** with this:

*Wherefore, casting away all uncleanness and abundance of naughtiness, with meekness receive the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls*. [Jas 1.21]

*Wherefore* (that is, in order to deserve to receive the Spirit of truth),

*casting away all uncleanness* (of soul and body)

*and abundance of naughtiness* (the thoughts of a depraved mind),

*with meekness* (for the meek shall inherit the earth)

*receive the ingrafted word* (which is given by God only to the meek, and those who are dove-like in their meekness).

And note that when a shoot is grafted onto an old tree, it rejuvenates it and makes it fruitful. In the same way, when the Spirit of truth is grafted onto a mind *grown old in evil days* [Dan 13.52] it rejuvenates it and makes it bring forth fruits worthy of repentance.

We pray you then, Lord Jesus, that as you have ascended from this world to the Father in the form of our humanity, you will draw us after you with the cord of love. Do not convict us of sin, but make us to imitate the justice of the saints, and stand in awe of your judgement. Pour into us the Spirit of truth, who will teach us all truth. Grant this, you who are blessed and glorious for ever and ever. Let every soul say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] cf. P. LOMBARD, *Sententiae* III, dist.3,4

[2] cf. P. LOMBARD, *Sententiae* III, dist.6,2

[3] Antony seems to misunderstand Aristotle, who wrote that eggs have a wider and a narrower end, and are laid wide end first. Those that are longer, with a pointed tip, produce females; the rounder ones with blunt tips produce males. cf. *De historia animalium*, VI,2,559a

[4] AUGUSTINE, *De diversis, sermo* 351,4,7; PL 39.1542

[5] *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Num 25.4

[6] *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Num 25.3

[7] BERNARD, *De diversis, sermo* 17.2-4

[8] SENECA, *De moribus* 120; PUBLIUS SYRUS, *Sententiae* 806; SENECA*, De moribus* 104

[9] HORACE, *Epistolae*, I,2,62-63; P. SYRUS, *Sententiae* 240, 540

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

**(The Gospel for the fifth Sunday after Easter: *Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask anything*; which is divided into three clauses.**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon on the anointing of grace: *His unction*; and: *Zadok and Nathan*.)**

1. At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: *Amen, amen, I say to you: If you ask the Father any thing in my name, he will give it you*. [Jn 16.23]

John says in his canonical Epistle:

*His unction teacheth you all things*. [1Jn 2.27]

This unction is two-fold. First is the infusion of grace, of which the Prophet says:

*God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows*. [Ps 44.8]

"O God the Son, God your Father has anointed you, as man, with the oil of gladness, the gift of seven-fold grace, which has made you immune from every sin; above your fellows, because the Spirit was given you without measure, but to others only with limits. So John says: Of his fullness we all have received [Jn 1.16]."[1] The second anointing is the preaching of God's word, of which we read in the third book of Kings that Zadok and Nathan anointed Solomon in Gihon [cf. 3(1)Kg 1.38-9]. Zadok means 'justice', Nathan 'gift of grace' Solomon 'peaceful' and Gihon 'struggle'. The justice of a good life and the gift of grace (the word of dominical preaching) anoint the sinner who is reconciled to God in confession, in Gihon; so that being stripped of his sins and of temporal things he may struggle with the devil.

When the first unction anoints the mind inwardly, the second makes great progress; but when the former is lacking, the latter runs its course in vain. The Gloss says on this text, "No-one should give credit to the teacher for the things he learns from the teacher's mouth, if it is not from the teacher inwardly. The teacher's tongue works outwardly in vain; yet a teacher should not remain silent, but for the things he practices," because he preaching may yet have a preparatory value. So the anointing of inward inspiration, or of

dominical preaching, teaches us all that concerns the salvation of our souls: that is, to despise the world, to humble oneself, to hunger for heavenly joy. This is what the Lord speaks of in today's Gospel: *Amen, amen, I say to you: If you ask the Father any thing*, etc.

2. There are three things to note in this Gospel: first, the prayer for fullness of joy, beginning: *Amen, amen, I say to you*; second, Jesus Christ's own intercession for us with the Father: *I will ask the Father for you*; thirdly, Christ's own knowledge of all things: *Now we know that thou knowest all things*.

This Sunday we sing in the Introit of the Mass: *With a voice of singing*; and the Epistle of blessed James is read: *Be doers of the word*; which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the three clauses of the Gospel. The first part is: *Be doers of the word*; the second: *He who looks into the perfect law of liberty*; the third: *If anyone thinks himself to be religious*, etc.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the Father: *Our Father, who art in heaven*; and on the child of the stork.)**

3. Let us say, then:

*Amen, amen, I say to you: If you ask the Father any thing in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto, you have not asked any thing in my name. Ask, and you will receive; that your joy may be full*. [Jn 16.23-24]

*Amen* is the Hebrew word for affirmation: 'truly', 'indeed'. The Truth, with a double affirmation, promises us joy, so that we may believe what he says without doubting.

*If you ask the Father any thing in my name*. Note the words 'any thing', 'Father' and 'in my name'. Only one who has a child can be called 'father', so that 'father' and 'son' are correlative terms. When one speaks of a father, one implies the existence of a son of whom he is father. God is a Father, and we are his children who say to him daily, *Our Father, who art in heaven*. Isaiah says:

*Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer: from everlasting is thy name*. [Is 63.16]

And Jeremiah:

*From this time call to me: Thou art my father, the guide of my virginity*. [Jer 3.4]

The soul's 'virginity' is faith, working by love and keeping the soul undefiled; and God the Father is its leader and guide. As children, we ought to ask the Father for some thing; yet

every thing, apart from the love of God, is nothing. So the ‘something’ for which we should ask is the love of God. As children, we ask that we may love our Father, just as the young stork loves its parent.

It is said that the young stork loves its father so much that it feeds and sustains him in his old age, and this is by a natural instinct. In the same way we should support our Father as he ‘grows old’ in this world: that is, in his weak and feeble members, by feeding the poor and needy. *What you did for one of the least of mine, you did to me* [Mt 25.40]. If we ask for love, then the Father himself, who is Love, will give us what he himself is, namely love.

**(A sermon on the love of God: *I will give you a land flowing*.)**

4. So he himself says in Exodus;

*I will give you a land flowing with milk and honey*. [Ex 13.5]

Note the words: ‘land’, ‘flowing’, ‘milk’, and ‘honey’. The land, because of its stability, represents the love of God which confirms the mind in truth. So Solomon says in Ecclesiastes:

*One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh:*

*but the earth standeth for ever*. [Eccles 1.4]

One generation (the love of the flesh) passes away, and another generation (the love of the world) comes; but the earth (the love of God) stands for ever, because as the Apostle says:

*Charity never falleth away*. [1Cor 13.8]

This land is called ‘flowing’ because of its abundance, as in the Psalm:

*The stream of the river* (the abundance of divine love)

*maketh the city of God joyful* (the soul, in which God himself dwells). [Ps 45.5]

This land abounds with milk and honey. Milk nourishes, honey sweetens: so the love of God nourishes the soul, so that it may grow from virtue to virtue; and it brings sweet comfort to those troubled by any adversity. "Nothing is hard for a lover."[2] But when the sweetness of divine love is withdrawn, even the least trial seems hard to bear. Yet wood sweetened the waters of Mara [cf. Ex 15.23,25], and the meal of Eliseus made the bitter gourds palatable [cf. 4(2)Kg 4.39-41]. So the love of God makes sweet the bitterest of things; as Ecclesiasticus says:

*My spirit is sweet, and my inheritance above honey and the honeycomb*. [Ecclus 24.27]

The Spirit of the Lord is the spirit of poverty, of which Isaiah says:

*The spirit of the mighty is like a whirlwind beating against a wall*. [Is 25.4]

The ‘mighty’ means the poor who do not flinch in prosperity or adversity. Their spirit is like a whirlwind beating against the wall of wealth. The same Prophet says:

*The shield made bare the wall*. [Is 22.6]

This shield, which covers and protects the body, is the spirit of poverty, which hides the soul from the devil’s darts. This shield strips bear the wall of wealth. The ‘inheritance’ of the Lord is the Passion of the cross, which he left to his children, saying:

*Do this for a commemoration of me*; [Lk 22.19]

that is, in memory of my Passion. The Apostle possessed this inheritance, as an heir, when he said:

*I bear the marks of Christ in my body*. [Gal 6.17]

So the spirit of poverty and the inheritance of the Passion are sweeter than honey and the honeycomb in the heart of the true lover.

So he says well: *If you ask the Father any thing in my name*. The name ‘Christ’ (the Hebrew ‘Messiah’) means ‘anointed’ or ‘saviour’. We ask the Father, then, in the name of the Saviour, to give us the privilege of love; if not for our own sake, then at least for the sake of his Son by whom he saved the human race. We say with the Prophet:

*Behold, O God our protector: and look on the face of thy Christ*. [Ps 83.10]

as though to say, if you do not wish to look on us for our own sake, then at least look on the face of your Christ, beaten with blows for us, besmeared with spittle, pale with death. Look on the face of thy Christ: what father would not look on the face of his dead son? Look, then, Father, on us: because Christ your Son has died for our sake, for we were the cause of his death. As he commanded us, we ask you in his name to give us yourself, for without you we cannot exist. St Augustine[3] says, "Lord, if you want me to leave you, then give me another ‘You’, or else I will not leave you."

**(A sermon against those who ask for temporal things: *Hitherto you have not asked anything*.)**

5. So he says well: *Amen, amen, I say to you: If you ask the Father any thing in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto you have not asked any thing in my name*. The Gloss says: "Trusting in my presence, you have not asked anything; that is, anything which can be compared to what is permanent." In this text the Lord rebukes those who ask for temporal things, which are nothing. Hosea says of such people:

*Your mercy is as a morning cloud, and as the dew that goeth away in the morning*. [Hos 6.4]

As if to say, when you ask mercy of the Lord, you ask for temporal things which are like a morning cloud, insubstantial as air, an empty nothing. Temporal goods are as nothing, but in order to seem like something that nothing is wrapped in a kind of phantom reality. The appearance of a cloud hides the sun, and the abundance of temporal things turns away the thought of God. Job says:

*Fatness hath covered his face*, [Job 15.27]

because the fatness of wealth blinds the eyes of the mind. The Psalm says:

*Fire hath fallen on them, and they shall not see the sun*. [Ps 57.9]

The fire of worldly love blinds men's eyes, as a hot film covers the eyes of a bear. *Your mercy is as a morning cloud, and as the dew that goeth away in the morning*, because as the sun grows hot it evaporates just when it is most needed, and exposes plants and flowers to the sun's heat, so that they are scorched by the sun. In the same way worldly prosperity gives comfort in this world, but lets men down in eternal punishment.

Nahum says: *And as for Ninive, her waters are as a great pool*. [Nah 2.8]

Ninive ('beautiful') stands for the world, which is covered with a deceiving beauty as mud is covered with snow. Its refreshment is compared to a pool, which overflows with water in winter and dries up in summer. The world now abounds with the waters of wealth, but when the drought of death comes it will be stripped of wealth and delivered to eternal punishment. Until now, then, you have not asked anything; or if you have asked, you have not done so in my name, that is, for the salvation of your soul.

The Apostle shows the proper way of asking and praying when he writes to Timothy:

*I desire, therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made*. [1Tim 2.1]

Supplication means a careful attention to God in one's spiritual exercises. Anyone who prefers knowledge to saving grace gets only grief. Prayer is the disposition of the man who holds to God, and is a certain familiarity and loving conversation with him. It is the

condition of an enlightened mind to enjoy it as long as it may.

Intercession is the care to obtain temporal things that are necessary for this life. God approves the good will of those who ask, yet does what he himself judges best, giving freely to whoever asks well. It is what the Psalmist means by;

*For my prayer is still in the things with which they are well pleased*. [Ps 140.5]

'They' are the wicked. It is common to all, but more particularly to the children of the world, to desire tranquillity and peace, health of body, fine weather, and other things useful and necessary for this life and for the pleasure of those who misuse them. Those who ask for them in faith should only do so from need, and even then they should always subject their own will to the will of God. In asking, one should pray with devotion and faith, yet not clinging obstinately to these things. We do not know, though our Father in heaven does, what is needful to us in our present circumstances.

Finally, thanksgiving is the acknowledgement in mind and thought of God's grace and good will; and an unfailing and ceaseless reference of everything to God (though at times either outward expression or inner affection will be missing or at least sluggish. This is what the Apostle means by:

*To will is present to me; but to accomplish that which is good I find not*; [Rom 7.18]

as though to say, Good will is always present, but sometimes it is dormant and ineffective. I want to do what is good, but I fail. The charity that never fails is ceaseless prayer and thanksgiving, of which the Apostle says: *Pray without ceasing* [1Thess 5.17], and: *Give thanks always* [Eph 5.20]. So it is well said: *Until now you have not asked any thing in my name. Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full*.

**(A sermon on the joy of just and carnal people: *The almond tree shall flourish*; and on the wild ass.)**

6. Note that there is an empty joy, that of carnal people; and there is a full joy, which is that of the saints. Of the empty joy of the carnal, Isaiah says;

*A joy of wild asses, the pastures of flocks*. [Is 32.14[

There are two kinds of wild ass. One has horns and lives in Greece[4] ; of this, Job says;

*Who hath sent out the wild ass free, and who hath loosed his bonds*. [Job 39.5]

The other lives in Spain, and he says of this one:

*A vain man is lifted up unto pride,*

*and thinketh himself born free like a wild ass's colt*. [Job 11.12]

In the same way there are two kinds of ass (the proud) in this world. There are those who take pride in the horns of dignity; and others who exalt themselves only in the vanity of their minds, and cast off from themselves the yoke of obedience. The 'joy of asses' consists in the 'pastures of flocks', that is, of the poor. But those who grab and consume the goods of the poor will themselves be grabbed by the devil. As Solomon says:

*The wild ass is the lion's prey in the desert*. [Ecclus 13.23]

And Isaiah:

*Woe to thee that spoilest! Shalt no thou thyself also be despoiled?* [Is 33.1]

And so Solomon says of the empty joy of carnal people:

*The almond tree shall flourish, the locust shall be made fat,*

*and the caper tree shall be destroyed*. [Eccles 12.5]

The almond tree puts forth its flowers before the other trees. The carnal man seeks to flower in this world, but in the next world he will be bare of every flower. The locust (the devil) will grow fat on his fallen blossom, because (if I may say so) the joy of temporal glory is the fatness of the devil. And the caper-tree of carnal desire and worldly glory will be destroyed. St James says:

*The rich shall pass away as the flower of the grass:*

*for the sun rose with a burning heat, and parched the grass;*

*and the flower thereof fell off, and the beauty of the shape thereof perished.*

*So also shall the rich man fade away in his ways*. [Jas 1.10-11]

The root is carnal desire, the flower is delight in temporal things. When the sun rises (the severity of death, or of the Judge) the root dries up, the flower falls, and the beauty of its shape (honour from the world, friends and neighbours) will perish. So the joy of the world is empty.

Of the true and full joy of eternal life, Solomon says in Ecclesiastes:

*The almond tree shall flourish, the locust shall be made fat,*

*and the caper tree shall be destroyed*.

The joy of the saints consists in three things: the resurrection of the body, blessedness of soul, and freedom from the sting of the flesh and the temptation of the devil. The almond tree (the body) will flower with four gifts: brightness, agility, subtlety and immortality. The locust (the soul) will grow fat with the vision of God, the blessedness of the angels, and the companionship of the saints. The caper-tree will be destroyed, namely the sting of the flesh and the temptation of the devil. Of this, the Apostle says to the Corinthians:

*When this mortal hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? Now the sting of death is sin*. [1Cor 15.54-56]

So the caper-tree will be destroyed, because, as the Prophet says: *Strangers shall no more pass through Jerusalem* (that is, demons will not tempt the just man) *and evil beasts* (the desires of the flesh) *will not pass through it* [cf. Joel 3.17].

**(On the three characteristics of a mirror, and their meaning: *If a man be a hearer of the word*.)**

7. The first part of today’s Epistle is **concordant** with this double joy (full and empty).

*Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if a man be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he shall be compared to a man beholding the face of his birth in a glass. For he beheld himself and went his way and presently forgot what manner of man he was*. [Jas 1.22-24]

The doers of God’s word are those who ask for and receive the fulness of joy. Those who are only hearers are those who try to gain the empty joy of the world; of this, the Psalm says:

*It is time, O Lord, to do* (not just to hear and talk);

*they have dissipated thy law* (who hear it and do not perform it). [Ps 118.126]

Solomon says:

*He that breaketh a hedge* (the law), *a serpent shall bite him* (the devil). [Eccles 10.8]

He who does not live according to what he says and hears, dissipates the law. He is the man of whom it is said: *If a man be a hearer of the word and not a doer*, etc.

Note that a mirror is just a very fine glass, with these three characteristics: it is cheap, fragile and clear. Glass is a cheap material, made of a little sand, fragile in substance but transparently bright. When it is placed face to the sun, it shines just like the sun. A mirror reflects the light, and women use it to look at their own faces. Ordinary glass allows light to pass through, and one can see clearly what is on the other side. Mirror-glass represents Holy Scripture, in whose light we see 'the face of our birth', we see whence we were born, what we are born, and to what end we are born. Whence, referring to the lowliness of the matter we are made of; what, referring to the frailty of our nature; to what end, referring to the dignity and glory with which we shall shine, like reflections of the true sun which is so near, if we be doers of the word.

In the mirror of holy doctrine we find these three things: lowliness of matter: *Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return* [Gen 3.19]; frailty of nature: *Our years shall be considered as a spider* [Ps 89.9]- for what is frailer than a spider's web? What more fragile than human life, destroyed by a small injury or a slight disease? Glory, as the Gospel says: *The just shall shine like the sun*, etc. [Mt 13.43].

In this mirror wretched man considers the face of his birth, how he was born, how frail he is and what lies ahead; and for a little while he feels compunction and wants to repent. But because he is only a hearer of the word and not a doer; because he is a lover of vain and empty joys, straightway he forgets what he is and what he has seen of himself. Vain joy takes away the memory of his proper salvation. On the other hand, the memory of full joy generates in the soul a concern for what belongs to salvation: Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

The Church recalls this joy in the Introit of today's Mass:

*With a voice of joy declare it to the ends of the earth*... [cf. Is 48.20]

O preachers, *with a voice of joy* (namely: *Ask and your joy will be full*) declare not only to the just who are in the midst of the Church, but *to the ends of the earth* (those who are outside its bounds, the Lord's precepts which are our boundary-marks), that they may hear the voice of joy and gain the fulness of joy which will have no end. May Jesus Christ lead us to that joy. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the Annunciation, Nativity or Passion of the Lord: *Moses said to Aaron: Take a thurible*.)**

8. There follows, secondly:

*I will ask the Father for you. For the Father himself loveth you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came out from God*. [Jn 16.26-27]

Christ, a priest according to the order of Melchisedec, and Mediator between God and man, asks the Father for us. As Leviticus says:

*The priest praying for them, the Lord will be merciful unto them*. [Lev 4.20]

And again:

*The priest shall pray for him, and for his sin: and it shall be forgiven him*. [Lev 4.26]

There is a **concordance** in the book of Numbers, where:

*Moses said to Aaron: take the censer, and putting fire in it from the altar, put incense upon it; and go quickly to the people to pray for them. For already wrath is gone out from the Lord, and the plague rageth. When Aaron had done this, and had run to the midst of the multitude which the burning fire was now destroying, he offered the incense. And standing between the dead and the living, he prayed for the people, and the plague ceased*. [Num 16.46-48]

*Moses said to Aaron*: that is, the Father said to the Son: *Take the censer* of humanity, which was made by the smith Bezaleel ('divine overshadowing', signifying that of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the glorious Virgin, whom he overshadowed by bestowing grace and entirely extinguishing any spark of sin in her); *and fill that censer* of humanity *with the fire* of divinity (for the fulness of divinity dwelt corporeally in it [Col 2.9]) *from the altar* (because he came out from the Father and entered the world). *Put the incense* of your Passion *upon it*, and so as Mediator you will *pray for the people* whom the devil's fire has cruelly laid waste. Obedient to the commanding will, *he ran with the censer* to death, *even death on the Cross* [Phil 2.8]; and *standing* with hands outstretched on the Cross *between the dead and the living* (that is, between the two thieves, one of whom was saved and the other damned; or else, between those detained in the prison of hell and those who lived in the miseries of this exile), as he *offered himself as a sacrifice in an odour of sweetness* [Eph 5.2] he freed them all from the fire of the devil's persecution.

So he well says of himself: *I will ask the Father for you*. In his canonical Epistle John says:

*We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just. And he is the propitiation* (that is, the appeasement) *for our sins*. [1Jn 2.1-2]

That is why we offer him daily in the Sacrament of the altar to God the Father, that he may be appeased for our sins. We do as is done by a woman with the little child, when her husband is angry with her and about to beat her. She holds up the little one in her arms and faces her angry husband, saying, "Hit him! Beat him!" The little child, full of tears, suffers with his mother; and the Father whose heart is moved by the tears of his child whom he loves dearly, spares his wife for his sake. In the Sacrament of the altar we

offer to God the Father, who is angered by our sins) his Son Jesus Christ, for the covenant of our reconciliation. So, being reminded of his tears, labour and Passion, he may turn away the punishment we have deserved and spare us: if not for our own sake, at least for the sake of his beloved Son.

So the Son himself says in Isaiah:

*I have made you, and I will bear, I will carry and save*. [Is 46.4]

Note these four words: *I have made* man; *I will bear* him on my shoulders like a lost and weary sheep; *I will carry* him as a nurse carries a child in her arms. And what can the Father answer to this*? I will save*. So Christ says well: *I will ask the Father for you; for the Father himself loveth you, because you have loved me and believed that I came out from God*. The Father and the Son are one, as the Son bears witness: *I and the Father are one* [Jn 10.30]. He who loves the Father loves the Son as well, and the Father and the Son love him. So he says in John:

*He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him and manifest myself to him*. [Jn 14.21]

9. There is a **concordance** to this love in the second part of today's Epistle:

*But he that hath looked into the perfect law of liberty and hath continued therein, not becoming a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work; this man shall be blessed in his deed*. [Jas 1.25]

The law of perfect liberty is the love of God, which renders a man perfect in every respect, and free from all servitude. The Psalm says of the just man: *The Law of his God is in his heart*. [Ps 36.31]

The law of divine love is in the heart of the just man, so that we read in Proverbs:

*My son, give me thy heart.* [Prov 23.26]

As a hawk seeks first the heart of the bird it catches, and consumes it, so God wants nothing and loves nothing so much as the human heart in which is the law of love; so that: *His steps shall not be supplanted* [Ps 36.31]. The steps of the just are the works and affections of his mind. These will not be supplanted or ensnared by the devil's temptations; nor will they slip in the street of worldly vanity. Of the former, Job says:

*The sole of his foot shall be held in a snare: and thirst shall burn against him*. [Job 18.9]

The foot of the wicked is held in the snare of evil suggestion, and so the thirst of cupidity burns against him. Of the latter, Jeremiah says in Lamentations:

*Our steps have slipped in the way of our streets*. [Lam 4.18]

A street is wide, and our works are the steps by which our journeying is manifested and recognised: a man is known by his works. In the muddy streets of worldly pleasure the works of sinners slip, so that they fall from sin to sin and eventually plunge into hell. The Psalm says:

*Let their way become dark and slippery:*

*and let the* (evil) *angel of the Lord pursue them*, [Ps 34.6]

until it casts them into the abyss of hell. But the step of the just man is not supplanted, because the law of love is in his heart, and he who continues in it will be blessed in his deed. The love of God confers grace in this present life, and the blessedness of glory in that which is to come. May he who is blessed for ever bring us to it! Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on God's mercy, judgement and power: *He commandeth the sun and it riseth not*.)**

10. There follows, thirdly:

*His disciples say to him: Now we know that thou knowest all things, and thou needest not that any man should ask thee. By this we believe that thou came forth from God*. [Jn 16.29,30]

The disciples said truly, *Now we know that thou knowest all things*. So the Apostle bears witness to it to the Hebrews:

*The word of the Lord is living and effectual and more piercing than any two-edged sword and reaching to the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints also and the marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature invisible in his sight; but all things are naked and open to his eyes*. [Heb 4.12-13]

The word, that is the Son of God, by whom we know his will, is alive and confers life. He is effectual, capable of giving full effect easily to whatever he wills. The word of God is effectual because the Son of God *hath done all things whatsoever he would* [Ps 113B, 3]. He has done what he would, where he would, and when he would. So Job says:

*He commandeth the sun and it riseth not:*

*and shutteth up the stars as it were under a seal.*

*He alone spreadeth out the heavens:*

*and walketh upon the waves of the sea.*

*He maketh Arcturus, and Orion, and Hyades,*

*and the inner parts of the south.*

*He doth things great and incomprehensible and wonderful:*

*of which there is no number*. [Job 9.7-10]

He who does things like these truly knows all things! Truly the Son of God, living and efficacious, can do all things!

*He commandeth the sun and it riseth not*.

The sun stands for the illumination of grace, which 'rises' when it is infused into the mind, and 'rises not' when it is not granted. So the Lord says in Exodus: *I shall harden Pharao's heart* [Ex 4.21]. God is said to harden the heart when he withdraws his grace, or does not grant it. So he says in Hosea:

*I will not visit upon your daughters when they commit fornication.* [Hos 4.14]

Nothing worse can happen to a sinful soul than when the Lord leaves the sinner in the wickedness of his heart, and does not correct him with the scourge of fatherly visitation.

*And shutteth up the stars as it were under a seal*.

A seal is impressed upon something so that it may stay hidden until it is unsealed. The 'stars' are the saints, whom Christ shuts up under the seal of his providence, so that they may not appear when they will, but are always ready for the time set by God; so that when they hear with their heart's ear the voice of their Master, they may go out from the secrecy of contemplation to the work that needs to be done.

*He alone spreadeth out the heavens*.

The 'heavens' are holy preachers, whose words fall like rain, who lighten with the examples of holy life, and thunder with threats of eternal punishment. The Lord spreads these heavens so as to shed light everywhere, to cover sinners and take care that they themselves do not become involved in temporal matters.

*And walketh upon the waves of the sea*.

The ‘waves of the sea’ are the proud of the world. The Lord walks on them when he imprints upon their hearts the footsteps of his humility. So he says in Ecclesiasticus:

*I alone have compassed the circuit of the heaven,*

*and have penetrated into the bottom of the deep,*

*and have walked in the waves of the sea.*

*And I have stood in all the earth; and in every people,*

*and in every nation I have had the chief rule,*

*and by my power I have trodden under my feet the hearts of all the high*. [Ecclus 24.8-11]

I compass, defend and protect the ‘circuit of heaven’ (the hearts of the just), the ‘bottom of the deep’ (the hearts of evil-doers, converting them by repentance), and the ‘waves of the sea’ (those tossed about by temptation); and ‘I have stood in all the earth’, because God stands upon the humble, and upon those fruitful and firm in good works, whereas the devil stands upon the sand; and in every people and in every nation, wherein the Church is gathered.

**(A sermon on the mortification of the body: *He maketh Arcturus and Orion*.)**

11. There follows:

*He maketh Arcturus, and Orion, and Hyades, and the inner parts of the south*.

Note these four words. Arcturus is what is called by the Latins the ‘north star’, a constellation of seven stars called ‘the wain’, because it resembles a wain. Five stars form the cart, and two together form the oxen. The five stars stand for the five senses of the body, the two stars for hope and fear which should draw them along like a pair of oxen. There is a **concordance** to this in the first book of Kings, where it says that the Philistines took two cows and yoked them to a cart, and laid the ark of God on the new cart [cf. 1Kg(Sm) 6.10-11]. The cart with its revolving wheels represents our body, which should go round in works of mercy. It is made new by the satisfaction of penance, and should bear the ark of obedience. Two cows (hope and fear) should pull this cart to Bethsames (meaning ‘house of the sun’), the mansion of eternal life where the sun of justice dwells.

Orion is the constellation with the sword; the Latins refer to his belt, armed with a sword, terrible and bright with star-light. Orion rises in the depths of winter, and at his rising

causes rain and storms. Orion stands for heartfelt contrition and oral confession, which by their influence cause the rain of tears and the storms of discipline, fasting and abstinence.

The Hyades are five stars arranged like the letter Y. The Hyades are the five words which Paul, writing to the Corinthians, wanted to speak in the Church with understanding: the word of prayer, the word of praise, the word of counsel, the word of exhortation and the word of confession [cf. 1Cor 14.19].

**(A sermon for the day of Pentecost: Arise, *O north wind*.)**

The ‘inner parts of the south’: the south wind is hot, and represents the Holy Spirit, of which the Bride says in Canticles:

*Arise, O north wind, and come, O south wind:*

*blow through my garden, and let the aromatical spices thereof flow*. [Cant 4.16]

The north wind freezes the waters, like the devil who with his cold malice stops up the waters of compunction in the sinner’s heart. She says to him ‘Arise’, in the sense of ‘Begone!’ and then ‘Come, O south wind’ to the Holy Spirit. ‘*Blow through the garden* of my conscience, *that its aromatical spices*, tears which are more sweetly scented than any perfume before the Lord, *may flow*.’ The ‘inner parts of the south’ mean the secrets of contemplation, the joy of the mind and the sweetness of inner consolation. These are as it were the inner secrets of ‘the south’, the Holy Spirit; and with them he himself dwells, and by indwelling blows with the sweet breezes of his love.

12. There follows:

*He doth things great and incomprehensible and wonderful: of which there is no number*.

He does great things in creation, incomprehensible things in Redemption, and wonderful things in eternal blessedness. Alternatively: He did great things in his Incarnation, so that blessed Mary said:

*He that is mighty hath done great things to me; and holy is his name*. [Lk 1.49]

He did incomprehensible things in his Nativity, when the Virgin bore the very Son of God. And he did wonderful things in his working of miracles. Blessed be he, because he knows all things and he did such things for us! So the Apostle says: *The word of God is alive and efficacious*.

There follows: *And more piercing than any two-edged sword*.

Christ strikes the soul with contrition, and the body with affliction,

*reaching unto the division of the soul* (here meaning the principle of animal life)

*and spirit* (meaning reason).

The soul is something incorporeal, capable of reason, whose function is to give life to the body. It makes men 'animals', who *mind the things of the flesh* [Rom 8.5], clinging to the bodily senses. When this principle becomes subject perfectly to reason, it immediately abandons the characteristics of weakness, and becomes a 'mind', endowed with reason, with the function of ruling the body. Thus as long as it is merely 'soul', it is soon weakened in things of the flesh; but the 'mind' or 'spirit' thinks only of what is strong and spiritual. So there is a division between 'soul' and 'spirit'.

*Joints and marrow*. The joints are where the bones meet, and the marrow is what moistens the bones. By 'joints', then, the subtle joining of thoughts is denoted, and by 'marrow' the compunction of tears which moistens the bones of virtue. Christ, by the power of his divinity, penetrates even to the division of joints and marrow, because he sees clearly the beginning, middle and end of our thoughts, and whither they tend, and how one is linked to another; and he sees how and by what wat compunction comes forth from the heart.

So Solomon says in Ecclesiastes:

*As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit,*

*nor how the bones are joined together in the womb of her that is with child:*

*so thou knowest not the works of God, who is the maker of all*. [Eccles 11.5]

Only God knows what is the way of the spirit (that is, contrition), and how the bones (the virtues) are joined together in the womb of one with child (the penitent mind). So the Apostle adds:

*But all things are naked and open to his eyes*.

As Job says:

*Hell is naked before him; and there is no covering for destruction*. [Job 26.6]

Truly indeed the disciples said: *Now we know that thou knowest all things, and thou needest not that any man should ask thee. By this we believe that thou camest forth from God*. The Son came forth from God, that you might go forth from the world. He came to you, that you might go to him. What is it, to leave the world and go to Christ, but

to restrain vice and bind the soul to God with the bond of love?

**(A sermon on the observance of silence, and of the many rules of religious life*: If any man think himself to be religious*.)**

13. So there is a **concordance** in the third part of the Epistle of today's Mass:

*If any man think himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue but deceiving his own heart, this man's religion is in vain. Religion clean and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulation, and to keep oneself unspotted by the world*. [Jas 1.26-27]

"Religion is what binds our souls to the one God for divine worship." "Religion is the offering of due observance and ceremony to some superior nature regarded as divine." Let a religious man who is puffed up in spirit, careless in speech and excluded from God's kingdom hear these words: *If any man think himself to be religious*, etc. The tongue should be controlled, and whoever does not silence it proves that he is without real religion. The beginning of religion is the bridling of the tongue.

So Solomon says:

*Who will set a guard before my mouth and a sure seal upon my lips,*

*that I fall not by them, and that my tongue destroy me not?* [Ecclus 22.33]

I should not speak even good things out of turn: there is a time to be silent and a time to say what is good. The word 'seal' is significant: what is shut up with a seal is closed from the sight of enemies, not friends. Let religious of our days listen, who burden the framework of their religious observance with so many complicated rules and regulations. They are like the Pharisees who gloried in the outward appearance of purity. God gave the first man (established in so excellent a state) just one short command: Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and he did not keep even so small a thing! They impose many new commandments and long regulations upon people of our time who are set in such wretchedness and misery, on the margins of society and indeed (to speak truly) amongst its dregs. Do you really think they will keep them? They will only have more to transgress.

Let them listen to what the Lord says in the Apocalypse:

*I will not put upon you any other burden; yet that which you have, hold fast*: [Apoc 2.24-25]

namely, the Gospel. The Gloss says: "Let them hear what St James says about true religion: Religion clean and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the

fatherless and widows, etc. True religion has two components: mercy and innocence. The command to visit widows and orphans includes everything we should do for our neighbour. The command to keep unspotted from the world includes every aspect of chastity."

Let us pray then, beloved brothers, that the Lord Jesus Christ will pour his grace into us, so that we may ask and receive the fullness of true joy; that he will ask the Father for us, to give us true religion, so that we may deserve to come to the region of eternal life. May he grant this, who is blessed, the beginning and the end, admirable and ineffable through endless ages. And let all clean and undefiled religion say, Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] P. LOMBARD, *Commentary* on Ps 44.9; PL 191.441-2

[2] CICERO, *Orator* 10,33

[3] AUGUSTINE, *In Ioannis evang*. tr. 27,9; PL 35.1619

[4] ARISTOTLE speaks of a horned ass (unicorn) living in India. *De Hist. an.* II,1,499b

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

**(The Gospel for the sixth Sunday after Easter: *When the Paraclete cometh*; which is divided into two clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon on the Resurrection of soul and body: *When the Paraclete cometh*.)**

1. At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: *When the Paraclete cometh, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, who proceedeth from the Father*, etc.

The Lord says by Isaiah:

*Thy dead men shall live, my slain shall rise again.*

*Awake, and give praise, ye that dwell in the dust,*

*or thy dew is the dew of the light*. [Is 26.19]

Dew is a finer precipitation than rain. It is said that dew drenches the fields longer when the night is clearer and the moon brighter, and it takes only a short time of the night for the dew to replace the moisture of the earth which it had taken all day for the sun to dry up. The dew is an image of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, who sweetly descends upon the mind of a sinner, cooling the heat of sin, carnal desire. So Ecclesiasticus says:

*A dew that meeteth it, from the heat that cometh, shall overpower it.* [Ecclus 43.24]

When the grace of the Holy Spirit meets a sinner, as he comes from the heat of vice, it cools the heat like dew. As it shows the sinner how many and how great vices his mind is wrapped up in, it humbles him to sorrow, to grieve over what he has done. So Jeremiah says:

*After thou didst show unto me, I struck my thigh*. [Jer 31.19]

After the grace of the Holy Spirit shows the sinner his accumulated wickedness, he

strikes his thigh (his body) with the scourges of penance.

And note that the Holy Spirit is rightly called ‘dew of the light’, because he gives refreshment like dew, and illumination like light. When the dew of light comes, those who are dead in sin come to life with the life of grace, and those slain by the sword of guilt rise in the first resurrection, that of penitence. Awake, then, you who are fast asleep in sin; and give praise to God by confession of sin, you that dwell in the dust of earthly vanity: because the dew of light is the Holy Spirit, Father of penitents and consoler of the grief-stricken. Of him the Son says in today’s Gospel: *When the Paraclete cometh*, etc.

2. Note two things in today’s Gospel: first, the sending of the Paraclete, beginning: *When the Paraclete cometh*, etc. Second, the persecution of Christ’s disciples, continuing: *These things I have spoken to you that you may not be scandalized*. This Sunday we sing the Introit of the Mass: *Hear my voice, O Lord, with which I cry to you*; and the Epistle of blessed Peter is read: *Be prudent*; which we will divide into two parts and **concord** with the two clauses of the Gospel. The first part is: *Be prudent*; the second: *Using hospitality one towards another, without murmuring*.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the Holy Trinity: *When the Paraclete cometh*.)**

3. Let us say, then: *When the Paraclete cometh*, etc.

The first thing to note in this Gospel is the clear statement of faith in the Holy Trinity. The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son; and these three are of one substance, and inseparably equal. Unity is found in the essence, plurality in the persons. Whence, "The Lord clearly implies the unity of the divine essence, and the Trinity of persons, when he says in Matthew: *Go, baptize all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* [Mt 28.19]. He says, ‘in the name’, not ‘in the names’, to show the unity of essence; but by adding three names, he indicates that there are three persons." "In that Trinity there is the ultimate Origin of all things, the most perfect Beauty and the most blessed Delight. As St Augustine shows in his book *On the true Religion*,[1] we understand the supreme Origin to be God the Father, from whom all things come, from whom come the Son and the Holy Spirit. We understand the most perfect Beauty to be the Son, the Truth of the Father, who resembles him in every way, and whom we worship with and in the Father himself. He is the form of all the things that are created from a single source, and which return to a single end. We understand the most blessed Delight and supreme Goodness to be the Holy Spirit, who is the gift of the Father and the Son. It is our duty to worship and hold on to this gift of God, as unchangeable as the Father and the Son. Thus by considering creation, we gain understanding of the Trinity in one substance, namely one God the Father from whom we exist, the Son through whom we exist, and the Holy Spirit in whom we exist. The Beginning to which we return, the Form which we imitate and the Grace by which we are reconciled." So that our mind may extend itself to contemplate the Creator, and believe without hesitation the Unity in

Trinity and Trinity in Unity, let us see how the ‘vestiges’ of the Trinity appear in the mind itself.

St Augustine says in his book On the Trinity,[2] "Though human mind is not of the same nature as God, yet the image of him, than whom nothing is better, is to be sought and found in that part of our nature than which nothing is better: namely, the mind. See how the mind remembers itself, understands itself and loves itself. When we see this, we see a trinity; not God, but the image of God. There is a kind of trinity apparent in memory, understanding and love or will. These three are not three ‘lives’, but a single life. They are not three minds but a single mind, not three essences but a single essence. We attribute memory to a subject, and similarly understanding and will (or love) belong to a subject; but life, mind and essence are themselves that subject. These three are one: a single life, a single mind, a single essence."

"Although these three are distinct among themselves, we say they are one, because they exist substantially in the soul. The mind itself is, as it were, a parent; and its knowledge is, as it were, its offspring. When the mind knows itself, it begets an idea of itself, and it is the sole parent of that idea. The third thing is love, which proceeds from the mind itself and from its idea, as the mind knows itself and loves itself. It could not love itself unless it knew itself. It loves its beloved offspring, its idea of itself; so love is a kind of joining of parent and offspring. See in these words how there appears a certain ‘vestige’ of the Trinity."

**(A sermon against those beset by the devil while living on earth: *Pharao set over the children of Israel*; and on the nature of frogs and spiders.)**

4. Let us say, then:

*When the Paraclete cometh, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth*, etc.

Note these three words: ‘Paraclete’, ‘Spirit’ and ‘Truth’. In the miseries of our exile there are three evils: suffering which torments, guilt which kills, and vanity which deceives.

Of the suffering which torments, Exodus says:

*Pharao set over the children of Israel masters of the works, to afflict them with burdens. And they built for Pharao cities of tabernacles, Phithom and Ramesses*. [Ex 1.11]

In this way he who is called the Devil sets task-masters over Christians, demons assigned to each vice, to afflict them with the burden of sin. In Lamentations they groan:

*We were dragged by the necks: we were weary and no rest was given us.*

*We have given our hand to Egypt and to the Assyrians,*

*that we might be satisfied with bread*. [Lam 5.5-6]

The Babylonians (the demons) impose heavy burdens on the neck of the man they take captive, and they drag him with threats, like an ox or an ass, with a cord tied to his neck. They give no rest to the weary as they hurl him from sin to sin. Alas! What madness to be weary of the road, yet unwilling to stop! They say: We have given our hand (that is, made ourselves slaves) to Egypt (the world) and the Assyrians (the demons) that we might be satisfied with the bread of carnal pleasure. They build cities for Pharao, the Devil: Phithom and Ramesses.

Phithom means ‘mouth of the abyss’, and Ramesses ‘malice of the moth’. Phithom stands for lust, the mouth of an abyss that never says "Enough!", where the light of grace never reaches, bottomless and never filled. As St Jerome[3] says, "Pleasure is always hungry."

Of this abyss the Psalm says, *Deep calleth to deep* [Ps 41.8], that is, lust calls to lust, as frog calls to frog. The frog has its proper call, or ‘croak’, which it only makes in water. At the time of mating, the male calls to the female with this particular call, which it magnifies by putting its lower jaw level with the water and stretching out the upper. As its mouth gapes, its eyes shine like candles. Again, they resemble spiders when they wish to mate. The female draws the male with a thread of web, and then the male draws the female. This pulling does not stop until they are joined. The lustful are like frogs who, in the waters of carnal pleasure, invite one another to lust by signs and words. Their eyes are full of adultery, burning with desire. Like spiders they draw themselves together by threads of words and promises, and join themselves in the abyss of perdition.

Ramesses stands for avarice, which eats away the mind as a worm eats clothing. The moth is tenacious, staying where it is until it eats it away. In the same way avarice eats away the mind of the miser, multiplying many things, yet the more it grows the hungrier the wretch is. So St Bernard[4] says: "Gold can no more satisfy man’s heart than air his body." And the Philosopher[5] says: "What worse can you wish a miser than long life?" and "The only good thing a miser does, is to die." These, then, are the Devil’s cities, lust and avarice. What greater torment than to be imprisoned in the abyss and eaten up by worms?

**(A sermon against those in the midst of pleasures: *They laid Asa*.)**

5. Of the guilt which kills, Genesis says:

*Rachel died and was buried in the highway that leadeth to Ephrata*. [Gen 35.19]

Ephrata means ‘fruitful’, and stands for the abundance of temporal things with which the

unhappy soul is smothered; and when it is buried it is weighed down with the mass of evil custom. In this way the rich man dressed in purple, who in this life was immersed in pleasure, will be buried in the next in the pains of hell. In this way, as the second book of Chronicles says:

*They laid Asa on his bed, full of spices and odoriferous ointments, which were made by the art of the perfumers, and they burnt them over him with very great pomp*. [2Chr 16.14]

Asa (‘taking away’) is the proud rich man of this world, of whom the Psalmist says:

*I have seen the wicked highly exalted, and lifted up like the cedars of Libanus*. [Ps 36.35]

His ‘bed’ is his body, in which he lies helpless like a paralytic, and it is full of spices and odoriferous ointments (honours, riches and pleasures) made by the art of the perfumers, the demons. Afterwards the unhappy soul will be buried with his unhappy body in the unquenchable fire of hell, with a great burning.

*Every man at first setteth forth good wine, then that which is worse*. [Jn 2.10]

Because you drank from the golden chalice of Babylon, you will drink to the dregs from the pit of eternal damnation.

**(A sermon against the vanity of the world, which deceives even a spiritual man*: A certain old prophet deceived the man of God*.)**

6. Of the vanity which deceives, it says in the third book of Kings that:

*a certain old prophet... deceived the man of God... and brought him back to his own house to eat bread and drink water... When he had eaten and drunk he saddled his ass. And when he was gone, a lion found him in the way and killed him. And his body was cast in the way, and the ass stood by him, and the lion stood by the dead body. And the lion did not hurt the ass, nor eat of the dead body*. [3(1)Kg 13.11,19,23-4,28]

The ‘old prophet’ is the vanity of the world which always prophesies falsehoods. So Jeremiah says in Lamentations:

*Thy prophets have seen false and foolish things*. [Lam 2.14]

Our prophets are the vanity of the world and the pleasure of the flesh. If they seeus despising the world or afflicting the flesh, they immediately prophesy want and weakness to us. "If you give away your property," they say, "how will you live? If you afflict your flesh, you will make yourself ill." Alas! How many people these prophets deceive! They are prophets who speak in their own name, not the name of the Lord.

It is well said, then, that an old prophet deceived the man of God. The vanity of the world is well called an ‘old prophet’, because from the beginning of the world to the fag-end of the age it has gone on deceiving, and will go on. In its house the man of God was deceived, and ate bread and drank water. The bread is the splendour of worldly glory, of which Solomon says in Proverbs:

*The bread of lying is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with a coal*. [Prov 20.17]

St Augustine says:[6] "Everything which must be given up at last, should be regarded as something already done with." Because this glory is sweet to a man, it will fill his mouth with a coal, a fiery stone: eternal punishment which can neither be swallowed nor vomited up. To ‘drink water’: this water is lust or avarice which *whoever drinks will thirst again* [cf. Jn 4.13]. He who eats this bread and drinks this water will be killed by a lion, the devil. Yet notice that the lion did not hurt the ass nor eat the dead body. This is because the devil does not care about money or the body, but only to be able to kill the soul. He is like the king of Sodom who said to Abraham: *Give me the souls, and the rest take* [Gen 14.21]. Christ bought the soul by delivering his own soul to death [cf. Is 53.12]; and the devil wants to defraud so great a purchaser and so great a labour, by his desire to kill our souls.

**(A sermon to comfort those who are in temptation: *When thou shalt pass through the waters I will be with thee*.)**

7. The Lord sends the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit of truth, against these three evils, suffering, guilt and vanity. As Paraclete he confronts suffering, as Spirit he confronts guilt, and as truth he confronts vanity. The Paraclete comforts us in suffering and tribulation; as he says in Isaiah:

*When thou shalt pass through the waters I shall be with thee;*

*and the rivers shall not cover thee.*

*When thou shalt walk in the fire, thou shalt not be burnt;*

*and the flames shall not burn in thee*. [Is 43.2]

Note these four words: ‘waters’, ‘rivers’, ‘fire’ and ‘flames’. The waters stand for greed and lust, the rivers for worldly prosperity, the fire for suffering and adversity, and the flames for the malice of the devil’s persecution. He says, then: *When thou shalt pass through the waters*, etc. A mind which the Holy Spirit strengthens with charity cannot be washed away by the waters of greed and lust, nor by the rivers of worldly prosperity. As Solomon says in Canticles:

*Many waters cannot quench charity, neither can the floods drown it...*

(for) *the lamps thereof are lamps of fire and flames*. [Cant 8.7,6]

Neither can a mind which the Holy Spirit fires be consumed by the fire of adversity or the flames of devilish persecution. As in the book of Daniel, the Spirit himself drives the flame of fire out of the furnace, and makes the midst of the furnace like the blowing of a wind bringing dew [cf. Dan 3.49-50].

He sends the Spirit to confront guilt and to give life to the soul. As Genesis says:

*He breathed into his face the breath of life; and man became a living soul*. [Gen 2.7]

The breath of life is the grace of the Holy Spirit, and when God breathes it into the face of the soul, he assuredly restores that soul from death to life.

**(A sermon on the infusion of grace and compunction of mind: *Daughters of Sion, rejoice and be joyful*.)**

And this Spirit is called 'of truth', to confront the vanity of the world, which truth itself drives out. So Joel says:

*Daughters of Sion, rejoice and be joyful in the Lord your God:*

*because he hath given you a teacher of justice,*

*and he will make the early and the latter rain to come down to you...*

*And the floors shall be filled with wheat,*

*and the presses shall overflow with wine and oil*. [Joel 2.23-24]

Blessed be the Lord our God, the Son of God, in whom we children of Sion (the Church, militant and triumphant) should rejoice in heart and be joyful in deed, because he has given us a teacher of justice, the Spirit of grace, who teaches each of us to show forth his justice. In his giving, he makes the 'early rain' (compunction for our own sins) and the 'latter rain' (sorrow for the sins of others) to come down. He who devoutly mourns over the sins of others perfectly washes away his own. In the descent of the teacher of justice, the floors (the minds of the faithful) will be full with the 'wheat' of faith; and the presses (their hearts) will overflow with the wine of compunction and the 'oil' of piety.

It is well said, then:

*When the Paraclete cometh, whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceedeth from the Father, he shall give testimony of me. And you shall give testimony, because you are with me from the beginning*.

The Spirit of truth will bear witness in the hearts of the faithful to Christ's Incarnation, his Passion and his Resurrection. And we too should bear witness to everyone that Christ was truly Incarnate, that he truly suffered, and also truly rose again.

**(A sermon on the just man renouncing the world: *Jacob passed over the ford of Jaboc*.)**

8. The first part of today's Epistle is **concordant** with this first clause of the Gospel:

*Be prudent and watch in prayers. But, before all things, have a constant mutual charity among yourselves; for charity covereth a multitude of sins*. [1Pt 4.7-8]

Note that blessed Peter urges us to three things: prudence, watchfulness and constant prayer.

Regarding prudence, Solomon says in Proverbs:

*Blessed is the man that is rich in prudence.*

*The purchasing thereof is better than the merchandise of silver*. [Prov 3.13-14]

A man who is negligent and improvident is open to many dangers.

Regarding watchfulness, Genesis tells how Jacob

*passed over the ford of Jaboc. And when all things were brought over that belonged to him, he remained alone; and behold, a man wrestled with him till morning... who said to him: Let me go, for it is break of day*. [Gen 32.22-24,26]

Jacob is 'the supplanter', and Jaboc 'torrent of dust' (meaning temporal delights which pass like a torrent, and are sterile, blinding the eyes like dust). The prudent man must cross this torrent with all the goods which the Lord has given him, and must remain alone. He remains alone when he attributes nothing to himself, but everything to the Lord. He subjects his own will to that of another; he does not remember the injuries he has suffered; he is not ashamed to despise himself. If he remains alone like this, he is well able to wrestle with the Lord, and beg from him whatever he will; and he will deservedly hear, *Let me go, for it is break of day*. In other words, it is already dawn, there is no more need to struggle. Misery is over for you, and glory begins. Thus it says of the soul of the just in Canticles:

*Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising,*

*fair as the moon, bright as the sun?* [Cant 6.9]

She is called 'moon' as being but one light. The just soul, when she goes up from this abode of misery, enters blessedness in which she is 'fair as the moon', being associated with the lights of the blessed souls, being one of them. She is 'bright as the sun', because she shines with the splendour of the entire Trinity.

**(A sermon on prayer: *Hear my voice, O Lord*.)**

9. Regarding constant prayer, the Introit of today's Mass sings:

*Hear my voice, O Lord, with which I have cried to thee.*

*My heart hath said to thee, I have sought thy face.*

*Thy face, O Lord, will I still seek, turn not away thy face from me*. [Ps 26.7-9]

Note that prayer is of three kinds: mental, vocal and manual. Of the first, Ecclesiasticus says:

*The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the heavens*. [Ecclus 35.21]

Of the second, the Psalm says:

*Let my prayer come in before thee.* [Ps 87.3]

Of the third, the Apostle says:

*Pray without ceasing*. [1Thess 5.17]

He ceases not to pray who ceases not to do good.

He says, then: *Hear my voice, O Lord*, (of heart and mouth and work), *with which I have cried to thee. My heart hath said to thee: I have sought thy face*. The Lord's face is that image according to which we have been created in his image and likeness. We lose it when we incur the guilt of mortal sin, superimposing the face of the devil upon the face of God. This Ecclesiasticus forbids, saying:

*Accept no face against thy own face*. [Ecclus 4.26]

The more sins you commit, the more you superimpose the devil's face upon the divine

face. The Psalmist says:

*How long will you judge unjustly, and accept the face of the wicked?* [Ps 81.2]

So that we may be able to find the face of the Lord which we have lost, let us light a lamp and search the house diligently until we find it [cf. Lk 15.8]. That is, let us be contrite for our sins, search out the corners of our conscience in confession, and be frequent in works of penance. Then at last we will be able to find the lost face of the Lord, and sing joyfully:

*The light of thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us*, etc.

Because the Lord’s face is restored and finally preserved by charity, St Peter adds: *Before all things, have constant mutual charity*, etc. Just as God is the Beginning of all, so charity, the principal virtue, should take first place. If it is mutual and constant it will cover a whole multitude of sins. It should be ‘mutual’, reciprocal and in common, and ‘constant’, not failing in bad times or good, but persevering to the end. Alternatively, charity is the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, who covers a multitude of sins as oil spreads over other liquids. But if it is blown away, what was hidden by it reappears: so also if the grace of God (which by penitence covers a multitude of sins) is blown away by repeated mortal sin, then what was forgiven returns. He who offends in one point, the law of charity, becomes guilty of all [cf. Jas 2.10]. So if you commit mortal sin again, and approach a fresh confessor, you should confess everything.

May the Holy Spirit, who is the love of the Father and the Son, deign to cover the multitude of our sins with his charity. To him be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on patience: *These things I have spoken to you that you may not be scandalized*.)**

10. There follows, secondly:

*These things I have spoken to you that you may not be scandalized. They will put you out of the synagogues; yea, the hour cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doth a service to God. And these things will they do to you, because they have not known the Father nor me. But these things I have told you, that when the hour shall come you may remember that I told you of them*. [Jn 16.1-4]

Because "spears seen beforehand do less injury"[7] , the Lord fore-arms his soldiers so that they may raise the shield of patience against the spears of persecution, and so not be scandalized when the crisis occurs. *These things I have spoken to you that you may*

*not be scandalized*. I, the Word of the Father, from whom you should take an example of patience, am speaking to you so that you may not be scandalized. Whoever is scandalized in time of tribulation through the scandal of impatience is separated from Christ's disciples. *They will put you out of the synagogues*, indeed outside the Synagogue. St John says:

*The Jews had already agreed among themselves that if any man should confess him to be Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue*. [Jn 9.22]

**(A sermon against many preachers, and on the nature of the wild cow which strikes the hunter with its dung: *Dost thou know that the Pharisees, when they heard this word*.)**

Christ says, *I am the Truth* [Jn 14.6]. Whoever preaches the truth, preaches Christ. Whoever conceals it in his preaching, denies Christ. "Truth leads to hatred,"[8] and so, not to incur anyone's hatred, they cover their mouths with a veil of silence. If they preached the truth as it really is, as truth requires and as holy Scripture clearly commands, then (if I be not mistaken) they would incur the hatred of carnal people, and maybe these would 'put them out of the synagogue'. But because they go by human standards, they fear human scandal; whereas truth should not be abandoned because of scandal. So Matthew reports what the disciples said to Jesus:

*Dost thou not know that the Pharisees, when they heard this word, were scandalized? But he, answering, said: Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind and leaders of the blind*. [Mt 15.12-14]

O you blind preachers! You fear the scandal of blind men, and so incur blindness of the soul! They do to you what the wild cow does to the hunter. Natural History tells us that the wild cow, when the hunter is pursuing it, shoots out its dung from afar and hits him; and while the hunter is hindered and delayed it makes its escape. To be sure, there are some prelates who do this sort of thing today! Like *fat cows on the mount of Samaria* [cf. Am 4.1], like *fine fat cows feeding in marshy places* [cf. Gen 41.2], they give the dung of temporalities to the hunter (the preacher), so as to escape his criticism. So Ecclesiasticus says:

*The sluggard is pelted with a dirty stone*. [Ecclus 22.1]

And the Lord says by Isaiah:

*I will stir up the Medes against them*, (preachers)

*who shall not seek silver , nor desire gold*.

*But with their arrows* (of holy preaching)

*they shall kill the children* (the lovers of the world). [Is 13.17-18]

**(A sermon on hospitality: *Using hospitality one towards another*.)**

11. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** with this second clause:

*Using hospitality one towards another, without murmuring, as every man hath received grace, ministering the same one to another; as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the words of God. If any man minister, let him do it as of the power which God administereth*. [1Pt 4.9-11]

[In Latin] the same word is used for one giving and one receiving hospitality, the one who stands at the door and the one who opens it. Preachers offer hospitality by opening the door of preaching to sinners, and without murmuring (that is, without scandal). Preachers are certainly ‘hospitable’, because like good stewards they should minister the manifold grace of preaching which they have received. Just as there are many kinds of sin, so there should be many kinds of preaching. The form of the preaching should re-form the soul that is de-formed by sin. So Peter says to prelates and preachers:

*Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking care of it, not by constraint, but willingly, according to God; not for filthy lucre’s sake, but voluntarily; neither as lording it over the clergy, but being made a pattern to the flock*. [1Pt 5.2-3]

And he adds: *If any man speak, let him speak as the words of God*. He ‘speaks the words of God’ when he attributes any skill in preaching which he has, not to himself but to God. Whoever ‘speaks the words of God’ is afraid of teaching anything beyond God’s will, beyond the authority of holy Scripture, or not useful to his brethren; and he fears to be silent about the things he should teach. *If any man minister* (in word or in any other duty of charity), *let him do it as of the power* (not his own but) *which God administereth*, *that in all* (our actions) *God may be honoured through Jesus Christ our Lord* [1Pt 4.11].

Let us humbly implore him, then, beloved brothers, to pour into us the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth; and to give us patience, that we be not scandalized in tribulation. To him be glory and empire for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] AUGUSTINE, *De vera religione* 55,113; PL 34.172.

The surrounding quotations are from P. LOMBARD, *Sententiae* I, dist 2,5 and 3,1

[2] AUGUSTINE, *De Trinitate* XIV,8,11; PL 42.1044;

Quotations from P. LOMBARD, *Sententiae* I, dist 3,2 and 3,3

[3] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Lk 15.14

[4] BERNARD, *De conversione* 14,26; PL 182.849

[5] PUBLIUS SYRUS, *Sententiae* 35 and 39

[6] AUGUSTINE, *Enarratio in Ps* 145,6; PL 37.1889

[7] GREGORY, *Homilia in Ev*. 35,1; PL 76.1259

[8] TERENCE, *Andria* I,1,41

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## PENTECOST

**(The Epistle for the holy day of Pentecost, which is divided into five clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon on the Holy Spirit himself, and on the property of chrysolite: *The spirit of life was in the wheels*.)**

1. *When the days of Pentecost were accomplished, the disciples were all together in one place*, etc. [Ac 2.1]

Ezekiel says:

*The spirit of life was in the wheels*. [Ezek 1.20]

The 'sounding wheels' [cf. Ezek 10.13] were the Apostles, who proclaimed the Son of God throughout the whole world. These wheels, as the prophet continues, had an appearance *like the appearance of chrysolite stone* [Ezek 10.9]. Chrysolite is a stone which gleams like gold, hence its name, from the Greek *chrysos*, gold. This stone seems to emit burning sparks from itself, and it puts to flight serpents of every kind. It represents the Apostles, who were resplendent with seven-fold grace and sent forth from themselves the sparks of preaching which set others on fire, and with which they put to flight demons of every kind. These wheels, as the same prophet says, were upright, high and of terrifying appearance. The Apostles too there was an upright posture in the rectitude of their precepts, height in the heavenly nature of their sublime promises, and a terrifying appearance in the threat and terror of the coming judgement.

And so the penitent says in Canticles:

*My soul troubled me, for the chariots of Aminadab*. [Cant 6.11]

Aminadab means 'spontaneous', and represents Jesus Christ who freely offered himself for us on the Cross; his chariots were the Apostles, of whom Habbakuk says: *Thy chariots are salvation* [Hab 3.8], meaning, 'for whose sake you give salvation'. So the penitent says: for them (that is, because of their preaching) *my soul is troubled*, stirring me up to repentance. So Habbakuk says:

*Thou madest a way in the sea for thy horses, in the midst of many waters:*

*I have heard and my bowels were troubled*. [Hab 3.15-16]

The Lord sends his horses (the Apostles) into the sea of this world, to stir up many waters (many peoples) by their preaching of repentance. *I heard* their preaching, says the penitent, *and my 'bowels'* (my fleshly nature) *were troubled.*

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the solemnity of the same Holy Spirit: *The third day had now come*.)**

2. In these wheels was the spirit of life, giving life to all, of which it says in today's Epistle:

*When the days of Pentecost were accomplished, the disciples were all together in one place: and suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Spirit gave them to speak*. [Ac 2.1-4]

*Pentecost* in Greek, *Quinquagesima* in Latin, is the fiftieth day, which was observed by the ancient people. Counting from the day of the sacrifice of the lamb, whereon the children of Israel went forth from Egypt, the Law was given in fire on the fiftieth day. And so, in the New Testament, on the fiftieth day from the Pasch of Christ the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles, appearing in fire. The Law was given on the mountain, the Spirit in the upper room.

So, *when the days of Pentecost were accomplished, the disciples were all together in one place*. None was absent, and the number of the Twelve was complete, and they had a single heart and soul. They were in the same place, the upper room to which they had gone up. Whoever desires the Spirit must leave the dwelling of the flesh and go up in contemplation of mind.

*Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting*.

The grace of the Holy Spirit knows no lagging nor labour; as it is said:

*The stream of the river maketh the city of God joyful*. [Ps 45.5]

He came with a sound, as he had come before to teach his people.

So there is a **concordance** in Exodus:

*And now the third day was come, and the morning appeared; and, behold, thunders began to be heard, and lightning to flash, and a very thick cloud to cover the mount. And the noise of the trumpet sounded exceeding loud, and the people in the camp feared*. [Ex 19.16]

The first day was that of Christ's Incarnation, the second that of his Passion, and the third that of the sending of the Holy Spirit, at whose coming 'thunders began to be heard', because *Suddenly there came a sound from heaven*, etc. *Lightning flashed* (the miracles of the Apostles) *and a very thick cloud* (of compunction of heart and penitence) *covered mount* Sinai (the people living in Jerusalem). So it says in the Acts of the Apostles:

*They had compunction in their heart and said to Peter and to the rest of the Apostles: What shall we do, men and brethren?* [Ac 2.37]

The noise of the trumpet (preaching) sounded exceeding loud; so Peter said:

*Do penance; and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins. And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*. [Ac 2.38]

And all the people in the camp feared, so that:

*They were baptized and there were added in that day about three thousand souls*. [Ac 2.41]

**(A sermon on the three tongues: of the serpent, of Eve and of Adam; and on the four natures of fire, and their meaning: *From the four winds there came*.)**

3. And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them; because it was by tongues (namely those of the serpent, Eve and Adam) that death entered into the world [cf. Wisd 2.24]. The tongue of the serpent was poison to Eve, the tongue of Eve poisoned Adam, and Adam's tongue tried to turn the blame back on God. The tongue is a cold organ, surrounded by moisture; thus: *It is an unquiet evil, full of deadly poison* [Jas 3.8], than which there is nothing colder. Therefore the Holy Spirit appeared in tongues of fire, to apply tongues to tongues, fire to deadly poison.

Note that fire has four natures: it burns, it cleanses, it warms, it gives light. Similarly the Holy Spirit burns away sins, cleanses hearts, shakes off sloth and enlightens ignorance. Fire is by nature incorporeal and invisible, but when it takes on a bodily form it appears in various colours, according to the materials in which it is burning. In the same way, the Holy Spirit cannot be seen except through the creatures in which he operates.

Note that the scattering of tongues came about at the tower of Babel. As pride scattered, so humility gathered together again. In pride is division, in humility concord. See how the Lord's promise was fulfilled:

*I will not leave you orphans; but I will send the Spirit, the Paraclete* [cf. Jn 14.18,26]

who speaks for everyone as their Advocate. Coming on behalf of the Word, he came with tongues. The tongue represents knowledge expressed in words, and the two elements cannot be separated. So the Word of the Father (that is, the Son) and the Holy Spirit are inseparable, being indeed of one Nature. *Come, spirit, from the four winds and blow upon these slain and let them live again*. [Ezek 37.9]

*And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Spirit gave them to speak*. Behold the sign of fullness. The full vessel overflows, and fire cannot be hidden. They spoke with every tongue; or else, though they spoke with their own (Hebrew) tongue, they were understood by all as if they spoke the proper tongue of each. The Holy Spirit, *sharing with each as he will* [cf. 1Cor 12.11], breathes his grace where, how, how much, when and on whom he will. May he deign to breathe it on us, he who this day breathed his grace on the Apostles in tongues of fire. To him be always praise and glory, through everlasting ages. Amen.

**(Second clause.**

**A sermon on the infusion of the Holy Spirit, and on the revival of the soul, and on the four corners of the world and their meaning.)**

4. *When the days of Pentecost were accomplished, the disciples were all together in one place*.

Ezekiel says:

*Come, spirit, from the four winds and blow upon these slain and let them live again*. [Ezek 37.9]

The four winds are the four corners of the world, east, west, north and south. The east represents Christ's Incarnation, the west his Passion, the north his temptation and the south his sending the Holy Spirit. Alternatively, the east stands for the remembrance of our wretched entry into life, the west for our woeful exit, the north the consideration of our unhappy state and the south the knowledge of our guilt. From these four winds the Holy Spirit comes and breathes with the breath of grace upon those killed by the sword of sin, that they may live again the life of penance. So it says in the Acts of the Apostles:

*While Peter was yet speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them that heard the word*. [Ac 10.44]

and in today's reading from Acts it says: *When the days of Pentecost were accomplished*, etc. There are four things to note here. The first is the completion of the fiftieth day*, When the days of Pentecost were accomplished*, etc. The second is the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, continuing: *Suddenly there came a sound from heaven*, etc. Thirdly, the appearance of the fiery tongues: *And there appeared to them parted tongues*. Fourthly, the Apostles' speaking in all tongues: *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit*, etc.

**(A sermon on Noah's ark, and on its five chambers and their meaning: *The ark of Noah*.)**

Let us say, then: *When the days of Pentecost were accomplished*. *Pentecost* in Greek, *Quinquagesima* in Latin: five times ten makes fifty. There are five senses in the body, and ten precepts in the Decalogue. If the five senses of our body were to be perfected by the ten precepts of the Decalogue, without doubt the most holy day of Pentecost would be fully come in us, that day on which the Holy Spirit is given. Regarding this 'fifty', Genesis says that Noah's ark was fifty cubits wide [cf. Gen 6.15]; but first we should note that the ark itself had five compartments. The first was the dung-chamber, the second was the store-chamber, the third was for the wild animals, the fourth for the domestic animals and the fifth for human beings and birds. Noah is the just man, whose ark is his own body; it is well-called an 'ark', because an ark was a 'strong-box' against thieves. Just so the just man's body should keep out every vice which might come to steal away virtues. The five compartments of this ark are the five senses; namely taste, smell, touch, hearing and sight.

**(A sermon on the five bodily senses and their disposition, properties and meaning: The first compartment is called the dung-chamber.)**

5. The first compartment is called the dung-chamber. This is the tongue in our mouth, by which we must expel in confession all the filth of sin. This is the 'gate of the dunghill' spoken of in the book of Esdras:

*And the gate of the dunghill Melchias the son of Rechab built... and shut up the doors thereof, and the locks, and the bars*. [Neh 3.14]

A dunghill is a place where rubbish is piled up, smeared and stained with filth. The mind of the sinner, stinking and stained with the devil's dung, must be purged through the gate of confession. Melchias the son of Rechab builds this gate. Melchias means 'choir of the Lord', and Rechab is 'going up'. Melchias is the penitent who goes up with timbrel and choir, that is, with the mortification of the flesh and the harmony of love. He sings a hymn to the Lord. He is a son of Jesus Christ ascending to the Father. This Melchias must fit 'doors' to his tongue, which are like interior gates or valves which veil and close off what is within. He shuts up all his inner goods, having at the forefront of his mind the words of Isaiah:

*My secret to myself, my secret to myself*. [Is 24.16]

He also fits ‘locks’, so that the unruly movements of the mind, as they attempt to break out, may be restrained by the locks of divine love and fear; and ‘bars’, so that according to time and place he may speak what is useful and be ever silent from what is evil.

6. The second compartment, the store-chamber, is the sense of smell in our nostrils. The nostrils are the passages for air or breath. They have three functions: breathing, detecting odours, and drawing off the brain’s effluent. It is inappropriate to breathe except through the nostrils, because this accords with the right order of creation. Breathing through the mouth may sometimes be necessary, but it is unhygienic and contrary to natural order. The nostrils are also the passages through which we sneeze, when air builds up in the brain and is suddenly expelled. It is often said that the nostrils represent discretion and prudence. Through these virtues we breathe in the spirit of contemplation and of heavenly charity, as it were through two nostrils. We receive, too, the odour of good example, and we purge out superfluous thoughts. And just as the right and proper way to breathe is through the nostrils, so by means of discretion and prudence the spirit of divine love is rightly drawn in, and it is breathed out again in the consolation and edification of our neighbour. Moreover, though by necessity we may have to breathe through the mouth, though it is unhygienic, so by necessity we may have to make confession by the mouth. You sin, so you must confess. If you will not confess, you will be damned. It is ‘unhygienic’, because it expresses unclean things, the defilement of which Luke speaks:

*Lord, let it alone this year also, until I dig about it and dung it*. [Lk 13.8]

The fig-tree is the soul, the ditch is contrition, and the application of dung is the confession of sins whereby the barren soul becomes fruitful. When the foul air of pride and vainglory builds up in the brain (that is, the mind), it is expelled suddenly by means of discretion and prudence.

7. The third compartment, of the wild animals, is the sense of touch in our hands. By these we ought to take hold of discipline, and with them we ought to chastise ourselves without mercy for our undisciplined thoughts, our careless words and our unruly actions. In this way, we should offer for ourselves as many sacrifices as there have been wrongful pleasures in ourselves. And note that as there are ten fingers on our hands, so there are ten kinds of discipline: mortification of self-will, abstinence from food and drink, knowing when to keep silent, keeping night-watch in prayer, shedding tears, occupying ourselves in suitable reading, bodily exercise, compassion for the needs of others, wearing coarse clothing and self-contempt. With these ten fingers we must grasp the discipline, and strike ourselves ferociously like wild animals. So, when the day of scourging comes to shatter the bones, we may be found worthy to obtain mercy.

8. The fourth compartment, of domestic animals, is the sense of hearing. Note that the ear is composed of gristle and flesh. Inside the ear is a winding passage, like a twisted

bracelet, ending in a bone which in form and substance is like the ear itself. Every noise and sound comes here, and so passes to the brain. A single vein goes from the brain to the right ear, and another to the left. And, apart from man, every animal that has ears is able to move them. Gristle looks like bone, but is not as strong. In Latin, the words for 'flesh' (*caro*) and 'dear' (*carus*) are very similar. The gristle and flesh from which the ear is made symbolise meekness and humility, than which nothing is dearer to God and men. These two must combine in every act of human hearing, so that to every injurious, vexing or contemptuous word a meek and humble reply is made. Nature itself teaches us this, nature which makes the inner passage of the ear winding and not straight, so that when you hear something displeasing it does not strike your mind suddenly, but comes as by a winding route, impeding its passage so that its force is spent and it becomes weak, pricking you little or not at all.

The two veins which go from the brain, one to the right ear and the other to the left, are temperance and obedience. The right stands for prosperity, the left for adversity. When you hear something advantageous and pleasant, you need temperance; when you are commanded what you do not like, or when you hear something adverse, you need obedience even more, because it is even more fruitful.

And every animal that has ears is able to move them, apart from man. He is truly deserving of the title of humanity, who does not have mobile ears: that is, who is not moved by the wind of words from the stability of reason. The man with itching ears, who readily turns his eager ear to flattery, is not worth calling 'a man': he is just a brute.

9. The fifth compartment, that of men and birds, is the sense of sight in the eyes. By this we should look with pity on the poor and on those suffering need; and attentively consider heavenly things, because, as the Apostle says:

*The invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made*. [Rom 1.20]

And in this way we complete the five compartments of Noah's ark, the five bodily senses of the just man.

Note, too, that Noah's ark was made according to the measure of the human body; *it had length three hundred cubits; the breadth of it fifty cubits; and the height of it thirty cubits* [Gen 6.15]. The length of the human body is six times its width and ten times its height; meaning by length the dimension from the sole of the feet to the top of the head, width across the ribs from one side to the other, and height from back to belly. If the five bodily senses were perfected by the ten precepts of the Decalogue, then indeed the dimensions of Noah's ark would be reached, by a factor of fifty, and the 'fiftieth' would be completed, the just man being perfectly fulfilled at the end of his life. So the Book of Wisdom says:

*Being made perfect in a short space, he fulfilled a long time* [Wisd 4.13-14].

It is well said, then: *When the days of Pentecost were accomplished, the disciples were all together in one place*.

The ‘disciples’ of the just man are the rational affections and pure thoughts of the mind. These are truly ‘in one place’ when the days of Pentecost, that is the perfection of the five senses, are accomplished. Note the words ‘together’ and ‘in one place’. ‘Together’ means as equals, at the same time. The thoughts of the mind are ‘together’ when, under the equitable rule of reason, they are composed in an orderly way and proceed with discretion, so that one does not vie with another for priority, nor is one forced into inferiority by another. If that were to happen, the lack of balance would destroy the whole structure. The Apostle says: *Let all things be done decently and according to order* [1Cor 14.40], so that he *may say to this, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh, and to his servant (that is, his body), Do this, and he doeth it* [cf. Mt 8.9]. Let the disciples be together, so that the thoughts of the mind, gathered together at one time and with one purpose, *as an army set in array* [Cant 6.3], may be able *to wrestle against the powers in the high places* [cf. Eph 6.12]. Let them also be ‘in one place’, not divided, because a divided mind is ineffectual. Ecclesiasticus says:

*My son, meddle not in many matters*. [Ecclus 11.10]

and:

*Woe to the sinner that goeth on the earth in two ways*. [Ecclus 2.14]

St Gregory[1] says: "A river which is divided into many streams dries up from its bed," and St Bernard[2] says: "The mind occupied in many things must be burdened with many cares." If the days of Pentecost be accomplished, and the disciples be together in one place, they will be ready to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit. May he who is blessed for ever and ever grant us this. Amen.

**(Third clause.**

**A sermon on the three kinds of sound and their meaning: *And suddenly there came*.)**

10. There follows, secondly[3] :

*suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting*.

Sound is whatever is perceptible by the sense of hearing, and these are its three kinds: vocal, by the mouth; by breath, as through a trumpet; and percussion, as upon a lyre. The ‘sound of a mighty wind’ is contrition of heart, which the penitent hears with his

heart's ear as if it were a sound. So the Lord says in John:

*The Spirit breatheth where he will* (because he has the means in his power to enlighten the heart) *and thou hearest his voice; but thou knowest not whence he cometh and whither he goeth*. [Jn 3.8]

The voice of the Holy Spirit is compunction, speaking in the heart of a sinner, and even if you hear it you do not know where it comes from (that is, how it enters your heart) or how it goes away again, because its nature is invisible. Note, too, that this sound is made in three ways: by the voice of preaching, by the breath of fraternal compassion and by the percussion of fatherly correction. From these three the sound of compunction is wont to arise in the heart of a sinner; so that it is well said: *Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming*.

**(A sermon for penitents or religious: *The third day had now come*.)**

There is a **concordance** in Exodus*: And now the third day was come, and the morning appeared*; as above. The first day is the recognition of sin, the second is abhorrence, and the third contrition of heart for it. When this comes, and the morning of grace is appearing, there begin to be heard thunderings of groans, sighs and accusations; and lightning flashes of confession. A very thick cloud, the obscurity of penance, covers the mountain (which is the penitent lifted up like a mountain from the valley of filth and misery). The sound of a trumpet, that of good life and good repute, sounds out loudly, that *Where sin abounded, grace did more abound* [Rom 5.20]. For this reason, the whole people (of demons) which are in the camp, always ready to fight, is afraid. When they see these things they dare not go out to battle. Job says:

*No man spoke to him a word, for they saw that his grief was very great*. [Job 2.13]

The malign spirits see that the sound of a mighty wind coming fills the whole house. This house is the mind of the penitent, in which he 'sits' (that is, humbles himself*). He recounts his years in the bitterness of his soul* [cf. Is 38.15], and the demons do not attempt to proceed further, nor speak to him a word of temptation. Note that the wind is mighty or 'vehement', as it were banishing eternal woe or drawing the mind above. Contrition of heart banishes eternal woe and draws the mind above.

**(A sermon on the property of the earth and its meaning: *The Spirit of the Lord has filled the earth*.)**

11. So it says in the Introit of today's Mass:

*The Spirit of the Lord hath filled the earth's globe: and that which containeth all things hath knowledge of the voice*. [Wisd 1.7]

A globe is round like a circle, the earth is dark, cold and unclean. The globe is the sinner’s heart that goes in circles like a wheel, going round the world, now east, now west. It is dark with pride, cold with avarice and unclean with lust. But the Spirit of the Lord fills the earth’s globe when it pours the grace of compunction into the sinner’s heart, and so banishes eternal woe from him. *That which containeth all things hath knowledge of the voice* refers to man, the rational animal who contains all the four elements from which all things are made. He has knowledge of his voice, because he understands when the Spirit speaks to him. So blessed Bernard[4] says: "As often as the Holy Spirit speaks to us, so often do we know what is good," while the Prophet says:

*I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me*; [Ps 84.9]

drawing the mind above. So the Philosopher[5] says, describing ‘spirit’, "Spirit is the vehicle of the virtues, whereby the virtues go out to perform their operations."

Let us ask the Son of God, then, to pour into us the spirit of contrition, to banish eternal woe and draw our minds up to heavenly things. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

**(Fourth clause.**

**A sermon on confession, on the manifestation of circumstances and on the ardour of satisfaction; and on the properties of the tongue, and its disposition and meaning: *And there appeared to them parted tongues*.)**

12. There follows, thirdly: *And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them*. [Ac 2.3]

Note these three words: ‘tongues’, ‘parted’ and ‘fire’. The ‘tongues’ are confession, ‘parted’ refers to the manifestation of circumstances, and the ‘fire’ is the ardour of confession and satisfaction.

Note that the tongue is the organ of the sense of taste, and that sense is greatest at the tip of the tongue. The wider part of the tongue is less sensitive. And the tongue senses all that is common to every body in respect to sense: warmth and coldness, hardness and softness. And this it does in all its parts. The tongue is created for tasting fluids, and also for speaking. The tongue of man is extremely loose, soft and wide, that it may be used in both operations, taste and talk. The tongue is soft and wide, and is thus well-suited for clarity of speech, because it extends and contracts and moves in all directions in the mouth, in various ways. When the tongue is wide and loose it can speak easily. This is obvious from consideration of those whose tongues are tied, who lisp and stammer. Some have other impediments of speech, affecting only certain sounds. This happens when the tongue is narrow, not when it is wide, for the small is contained within the great but not the great within the small. Because of this, birds with wide tongues can utter some sounds or words, to a greater degree than birds with narrow tongues.

As I have said, the ‘tongue’ refers to confession, wherein should be made manifest everything common to the whole body, that is, whatever is commonly committed by the whole body. For instance, hotness- the burning of pride; coldness- malice and laziness; hardness- avarice; softness- lust and self-indulgence. As the tongue is created for both taste and talk, so confession by the tongue is also two-fold, of praise and of sin.

The confession of praise includes the Offices and psalms. If we perform these devoutly, we taste the grace of compunction and the sweetness of contemplation. So St Gregory[6] says: "The voice of psalmody, when performed with due attention of heart, prepares a way into the heart for Almighty God to pour into the attentive mind either the mysteries of prophecy or the grace of compunction. So it is written: *The sacrifice of praise shall glorify me* [Ps 49.23]. When compunction is poured forth in psalmody, a way in the heart is made for us, whereby in the end we may come to Jesus."

13. In the confession of sin we must use words, in order to acknowledge our sins freely and nakedly and openly. Nature itself teaches us that this is so, because the tongue of man is loose, soft and wide. The confession of sin, then, must be free in manifesting all the circumstances, soft in shedding tears, and wide in forgiving every injury borne, in restoring everything wrongfully taken and in having a firm and stable intention of not falling again. Such a confession by the tongue makes the soul reach out to God in contemplation, constrict itself within itself by humility, and move about in every direction towards the neighbour by compassion. Sinners- wretched, stammering and foolish- have a narrow and impeded tongue, and when they confess they stammer and confess but half of it! It is well said, then: *There appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire*.

The tongue of confession should be ‘parted’, because in confession the sinner should have heart and tongue divided into many parts: the heart, in order to grieve in many ways for the wrongs committed; the tongue, to reveal in all their particularity the circumstances in which they were committed. You will find a fuller treatment of this in the sermon: *Jesus was led into the desert* [Lent I].

And note that fire warms what is cold, softens what is hard, hardens what is soft and burns right down things that stand high. In the same way the ardour of confession and satisfaction warms what is cold with the fire of love; softens hard hearts with compunction and hardens the soft and self-indulgent with the firmness of holy resolution; and humbles the loftiness of pride, burning it away with the remembrance of our frailty. Under such ashes the fire can be maintained continually.

We beg you then, dearest brothers, to let this fire sit (that is, rest) upon each of you, so that by it your tongues may be parted in the confession of sin and its circumstances, and so that by freely, nakedly and openly confessing them you may be found worthy to come to the confession of the name of the Lord with the angels in the heavenly Jerusalem. May he grant this*, whose fire is in Sion, and whose furnace is in Jerusalem* [Is 31.9], who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

**(Fifth clause.**

**A sermon on the sending of the Holy Spirit: *He sent fire from on high*; and: *The Lord brought the Spirit upon the earth*.)**

14. There follows, fourthly:

*And there appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Spirit gave them to speak*.

They are filled with the Holy Spirit, who alone fills the whole world and whom the whole world cannot fill. They cannot receive any other Spirit, because what is full cannot receive an increase. So it is said in respect of blessed Mary:

*Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women*. [Lk 1.28]

Note that between the words ‘full of grace’ and ‘blessed art thou among women’ come the words ‘the Lord is with thee’; because the Lord himself both keeps the fullness of grace inwardly, and works the blessing of fruitfulness (that is, holy operation) outwardly. Rightly, too, after the words ‘full of grace’ comes ‘the Lord is with thee’, because just as without God we can do and we have nothing, so also without him we can keep nothing we have. Therefore after grace it is necessary that the Lord be with us and keep what he alone has given. While he goes before us in giving grace, we are his co-workers in keeping it. He will not watch over us unless we ourselves watch with him. It is clear that our own diligence is needed, when he says to the Apostles:

*Could you not watch one hour with me? Watch ye and pray that ye enter not into temptation.* [Mt 26.40-41]

It is well said, then, that *They were all filled with the Holy Spirit*.

The Lord speaks of this in today’s Gospel:

*The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you*. [Jn 14.26]

The Father sent the Paraclete in the name of the Son, that is, to manifest the glory of the Son. He will teach, that you may know; he will confirm (support) that you may will. So we sing today at Mass:

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of thy faithful people*,

that they may have knowledge;

*and kindle in them the fire of thy love*,

that what they know they may desire to put into practice. Again we sing:

*Send forth thy Spirit and they shall be created* (by your knowledge):

*and thou shalt renew the face of the earth* (by good will). [Ps 103.30]

There is a **concordance** to these two in the Lamentations of Jeremiah:

*From above he hath sent fire into my bones and hath taught me* [Lam 1.13]

The Church says: The Father has *sent from above* (that is, from the Son), this day, *fire* (the Holy Spirit) *into my bones* (the Apostles); and by them *he has taught me* to know and to will.

15. Let it be said, then: *They were all filled with the Holy Spirit*.

There is a **concordance** to this in Genesis:

*The Lord sent the* (Holy) *Spirit upon the earth, and the waters were abated. The fountains also of the deep, and the flood-gates of heaven were shut up: and the rain from heaven was restrained*. [Gen 8.1-2]

Note these four things: waters, fountains, flood-gates and rain. The waters stand for riches, the fountains of the deep for the thoughts of the mind, the flood-gates of heaven for the eyes and the rain for an abundance of words. So when the Lord sends the Holy Spirit upon the earth (that is, upon the mind of the sinner) the waters of riches are lessened, because they are spent on the poor.

Of these waters, it says in Genesis that:

*The gathering together of the waters he called Seas* [Gen 1.10]

The gathering together of riches is nothing but the bitterness of tribulation and sorrow. So Habbakuk says:

*Woe to him that heapeth together that which is not his own.*

*How long also doth he load himself with thick clay?* [Hab 2.6]

Mud heaped up in the house makes a stench; spread about, it fertilizes the earth. So riches when gathered together (and especially if they are not one's own, but other people's) generate the stench of sin and death; but if they are spread among the poor, and given back to their proper owners, they fertilize the ground of the mind, and make it fruitful.

The heart of man is an abyss, of which Jeremiah says:

*The heart is perverse above all things and unsearchable. Who can know it?* [Jer 17.9]

The 'fountains of the deep' are thoughts. They are 'shut up' when the grace of the Holy Spirit is poured in. Regarding this, there is a **concordance** in the second book of Chronicles, where

*Ezechias gathered together a very great multitude; and they stopped up all the springs, and the brook that ran through the midst of the land, saying: Lest the king of the Assyrians should come, and find abundance of water*. [2Chr 32.4]

Ezechias is the just man, who must gather together a great multitude of good thoughts, and stop up the springs of wicked and perverse thoughts, and the brook of concupiscence, lest the demons find an abundance of waters and through them destroy the city of the soul.

The 'flood-gates of heaven' are windows, which admit light, and through which we see what is outside. The Greek for 'light' is *phos*. In the head, as if placed in the firmament, there are two luminaries, the eyes, like two windows through which we look. These are 'shut up' against the vanity of the world when the light of grace is poured into the mind. The rain which flows like a river stands for words, which flow everywhere without let or hindrance. Solomon says in Proverbs:

*The beginning of quarrels is as when one letteth out water* [Prov 17.14]

And Ecclesiasticus warns:

*Give no issue to thy water, no, not a little* [Ecclus 25.34]

This rain is restrained when, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the tongue is shaped to the praise of its Creator and the confession of its own sin. It is well said, then: *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit*.

**(A sermon against those who preach much but do little or nothing: *They began to speak in various tongues*.)**

16. *And they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Spirit gave them*

*to speak*.

He who is filled with the Holy Spirit speaks in various tongues. These tongues are the various testimonies to Christ (such as humility, poverty, patience and obedience) in which we speak when we show them in ourselves to other people. When actions speak, words come alive. Let words cease, I beg you, and let your works give utterance! We are so full of words, so empty of deeds! That is why we are cursed by the Lord, who cursed the fig-tree in which he found no fruit, but only leaves [cf. Mt 21.19]. St Gregory[7] says: "The law is given to the preacher, that what he preaches he may also practice. He vainly boasts of knowing the law, if he undermines his teaching by his deeds." The Apostles spoke *as the Holy Spirit gave them to speak*. Blessed is he who speaks as the Holy Spirit prompts, and not according to his own ideas. There are people who speak from their own spirit, stealing other people's words and putting them forward as their own, taking the credit themselves.

Of these and suchlike people the Lord says in Jeremiah:

*Behold, I am against the prophets who steal my words every one from his neighbour. Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, who use their tongues and say: The Lord saith it. Behold, I am against the prophets that have lying dreams, saith the Lord, and tell them and cause my people to err by their lying and by their wonders: when I sent them not nor commanded them, who have not profited this people at all, saith the Lord*. [Jer 23.30-32]

Let us speak, then, as the Holy Spirit gives us to speak, asking him humbly and devoutly to pour out his grace, so that we may complete the days of Pentecost in the perfection of our five senses and in the observance of the Ten Commandments. May we be filled with the mighty wind of contrition, and be set afire with the fiery tongues of confession; so that, ablaze and alight in the splendour of the saints, we may be found fit to see God the Three and One. May he grant this, who is God Three and One, blessed for ever and ever. Let every spirit say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] GREGORY, *Moralia, ad Leandrum epistola* 2; PL 75.513

[2] BERNARD, *De consideratione* II,10,19; PL 182.754

[3] There is a discrepancy between Antony's division of the Epistle in the table of themes, and in the body of the sermon.

[4] BERNARD, *De diversis, sermo* 23,5; PL 183.602

[5] SENECA, *Epistola* 41

[6] GREGORY*, In Ezechiele I, hom* 1,15; PL 76.793

[7] GREGORY, *Moralia* XIX,7,13; PL 76.103

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

[PROLOGUE FOR JUNE AND JULY]

I began this work, trusting in the grace of the Word Incarnate, who 'gives Wisdom a voice' and who 'makes the tongues of infants to speak'; whose hand, as Ezekiel says, 'is under the wings of the living creatures.' He is the First Principle of all creation, and with him as guide and pathway I hope to bring it to completion, to his honour and for the benefit of the faithful. At the start of this work I proposed to take the Sunday Gospels, as they are appointed throughout the year, and **concord** with them the writings of the Old and New Testaments read in Church, the Sunday Epistles and the Introits of the Mass. And if I could not do this fully, then at least I would do so in part. Note now, then, that from the first Sunday after Pentecost until the first Sunday of August, the four books of Kings are read in Church. There are eight Sundays in this period, so I want to arrange the material in such a way as to take various stories from each book, **concording** each book with two sets of Sunday Gospels and other readings, as seems appropriate.

## FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the first Sunday after Pentecost: *There was a certain rich man*, which is divided into four clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for prelates and preachers of the Church, who with sling and staff- that is, with deed and word- should overcome the devil: *He took his staff*.)**

1. At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: *There was a certain rich man which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day*, etc.[Lk 16.19]

In the first book of Kings it says that David

*took his staff, which he had always in his hands: and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them into the shepherd's scrip, which he had with him; and he took a sling in his hand; and went forth against the Philistine*. [1Kg(Sm) 17.40]

Note these four words: staff, five stones, scrip and sling. The staff is the cross of Christ, the five stones are the knowledge of the Old Testament, the scrip is the grace of the New, and the sling is the ability to make a balanced judgement.

David (that is, the preacher) must take his staff (the cross of Christ), so that with its support he may more easily bear the labour of his journey. Genesis says:

*With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I return with two companies*. [Gen 32.10]

The just man crosses the turbulent river of this world's love leaning on the cross of Christ, and so with two companies, the rewards of the active and the contemplative life, he returns to the Land of Promise. The preacher must always have this staff in his hands, that is, in his works. So Habbakuk says:

*His brightness shall be as the light: horns are in his hands.* [Hab 3.4]

The brightness of a holy life and preaching is light to the sinner. *You are the light of the world*, says our Lord [Mt 5.14]. The horns of the cross should be in the preacher's hands, so that with his hands so nailed he may not stretch out to anything unlawful.

*And he chose five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them into the shepherd's scrip, which he had with him*. The scrip was the leather flask containing milk, and it stands for the New Testament, in which we find the milk of grace. Milk is a good symbol of grace, for a mother gives it freely to her child, and asks nothing in return. The five stones are the five books of Moses, and so they suggest the knowledge of the entire Old Testament. The preacher should gather this to help his preaching from the brook which is the abundance of Holy Scripture, and put it in the scrip of the Gospel. The understanding of the Old Testament is to be found in the context of the New, *like a wheel in the midst of a wheel* [Ezek 1.16]. An alternative interpretation is to take the five stones to be the hard blows of the five senses; with which those devoted to the sensual pleasures of the flesh will be struck down. Those transgressors who, in the Old Testament, are struck down by stones represent sinners of the New Testament who will be severely chastised.

*And he took a sling in his hand; and went forth against the Philistine*. The sling is held by two straps of equal length, which indicates that there should be an equality between teaching and life. The preacher must take this sling in his hand, so that his hand should correspond to his mouth, his behaviour to his preaching. Only then can he go forth against the Philistine and slay him. The Philistine (it means 'one who falls down through drink') stands for the purple-clad rich folk of this world, drunk with gluttony and lust, who stumble from grace into guilt, and from guilt into gehenna- as today's Gospel tells us: *There was a certain rich man*.

2. There are four things to be noted in this Gospel. The first is the unequal lot of the rich man clad in purple, and of Lazarus the beggar: *There was a certain rich man*... The second is the death of each: *And it came to pass that the beggar died*... The third is the punishment of the rich man and the glory of Lazarus: *Lifting up his eyes*... The fourth is the prayer of the rich man for his five brothers: *I beseech thee, then, father*... As God

shall grant, we will **concord** these four clauses with some stories from the first book of Kings.

Note also that in the Introit of this Sunday's Mass is sung: Lord, *I have hoped in thy mercy*; and the Epistle of St John is read, *God is charity*, which we will divide into four parts and **concord** with the four clauses of the Gospel just mentioned. The first part: *God is charity*; the second: In this is the charity of God perfected; the third: *Fear is not in charity*; the fourth: *Let us therefore love God*.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon directed at the rich people of this world: *There was a certain man in the wilderness of Maon*.)**

3. Let us say, then:

*There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day.* [Lk 16.19]

This rich man has no name. It is as if he were unknown in God's presence, unfit to have his name recorded in the Gospel, because it is not to be recorded in the book of eternal life. It is his shame to be just 'a certain man', as one whom we disregard or do not know. This 'certain man' represents every worldly man, enslaved to the flesh and to sin.

*Behold the man that made not God his helper:*

*but trusted in the abundance of his riches: and prevailed in his vanity*. [Ps 51.9]

Note especially the phrases 'made not God', 'trusted' and 'prevailed', because these correspond to the opening words of the Gospel, like this:

*There was a certain rich man- that made not God his helper;*

*He was clothed in purple and fine linen- and trusted in the abundance of his riches;*

*He feasted sumptuously every day- and prevailed in his vanity.*

There is a **concordance** to this in the first book of Kings:

*There was a certain man in the wilderness of Maon, and his possessions were in Carmel*. And *the man was very great:... And, behold, he had a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and his heart was merry, for he was very drunk... Now the name of the man was Nabal*. [1Kg(Sm) 25.2,36,3]

'Nabal' means 'stupid', 'Maon' means 'a dwelling' and 'Carmel' means 'soft', so once again these three correspond to the phrases of the Gospel:

*There was a certain rich man- a certain man;*

*who was clothed in purple and fine linen- and the man was very great;*

*who feasted sumptuously every day- and he had a feast in his house.*

**(A sermon against the pleasures of the five senses: *Woe, you that rise up early to follow drunkenness*.)**

4. The worldly rich man is stupid, because he 'savours not the things of God' [cf. Mt 16.23]. He dwells in the wilderness of Maon, that dwelling of which the psalmist says:

*Let their habitation be made desolate*. [Ps 68.26]

His possessions are in Carmel, in softness, and it is he of whom the prophet Amos spoke:

*Woe to you that sleep upon beds of ivory and are wanton on your couches*. [Am 6.4]

He is that great man of whom David says:

*I have seen the wicked highly exalted, and lifted up like the cedars of Libanus*, [Ps 36.35]

and Job:

*I have seen a fool with a strong root: and I cursed his beauty immediately*. [Job 5.3]

He had a feast in his house, like the feast of a king, so that Amos says again:

*Woe to you that are wealthy in Sion... that eat the lambs out of the flock and the calves out of the midst of the herd; that drink wine in bowls and are anointed with the best ointments*, [Am 6.1,4,6]

and Isaiah:

*Woe to you that rise up early in the morning to follow drunkenness and to drink till the evening, to be inflamed with wine. The harp and the lyre and the timbrel and the pipe and wine are in your feasts: and the work of the Lord you regard not, nor do you consider the works of his hands*. [Is 5.11-12]

These five instruments represent the pleasures of the five senses. Our sight, which as it were stretches out to what it gazes upon, is like the harp which consists of the stretched nerves of a dead animal. The lyre, which gives out varied notes and sounds, represents hearing, which takes pleasure in varied sound. The timbrel, giving sound when it is beaten by the hand, represents touch. The pipe represents the sense of smell, which passes through the nostrils as through pipes. Wine has reference to taste. Those who seek to satisfy these five senses do not regard the work of the Lord, who has '*worked in the midst of the earth*' [cf. Ps 73.12] by his Passion and death; nor do they consider the works of his hands, his poor, whom he formed like a clay pot upon the wheel of preaching, and baked in the kiln of poverty.

**(A sermon against gluttons: *The priest's servant came*.)**

5. Let us say, then: *There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day*. The purple stands for worldly dignity, the linen for costliness of clothing, the sumptuous meals for the pleasure of gluttony. Purple is the colour of royal robes. It is a dye found in certain marine shells when they are cut with iron, the shells being gathered and emptied on moonless nights. How reminiscent of the poor, who are despoiled of their goods when worldly prosperity, fickle as the moon, is on the wane! That 'certain rich man', worldly power, slits them open with the force of iron, and extracts their life-blood, their livelihood, to make for himself the purple dye of earthly dignity. Of such, Job says:

*They reap the field that is not their own:*

*and gather the vintage of his vineyard whom by violence they have oppressed.*

*They send men away naked,*

*taking away their clothes who have no covering in the cold.* [Job 24.6-7]

The whore of whom the Apocalypse tells is clothed in this kind of purple [cf. Apoc 17.4]. The 'certain man' and the whore have the same meaning: the man relishes the earth, the whore exposes herself to the devil.

Fine linen, or lawn, is particularly white and soft, and so it represents all soft clothing. *They that are clothed in soft garments are in the houses of kings* [Mt 11.8], that is, of devils. *Glory not in apparel*, says Ecclesiasticus [11.4], and St Peter says:

*Whose adorning, let it not be the outward plaiting of the hair, or the wearing of gold, or the putting on of apparel; but the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptibility of a quiet and a meek spirit which is rich in the sight of God*. [1Pt 3.3-4]

*And he feasted sumptuously every day*. There is a **concordance** to this in the first book

of Kings:

*The servant of the priest came, while the flesh was in boiling, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand; and thrust it into the cauldron, or into the pot; and all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took to himself... Also the servant of the priest came, and said to the man that sacrificed: Give me flesh to boil for the priest; for I will not take of thee sodden flesh, but raw.* [1Kg 2.13-14,15]

The priest is the belly, and his servant (or 'child') is gluttony, of which Solomon says in Proverbs:

*The child that is left to his own will bringeth his mother to shame*. [Prov 29.15]

If a greedy appetite is not restrained, but left to itself, it brings shame to its mother, the flesh. At the beginning, the flesh incurred sickness through its immoderate desire for the fruit, and so fell into a trap. The servant has a fleshhook with three teeth, a reminder of the three-fold manifestation of greed, either devouring what belongs to another, or wasting one's own substance in prodigal living, or failing to observe due measure as to time and manner even in legitimate foods. With these three teeth the belly-priest takes to himself whatever the hook brings up. He will not accept pre-cooked flesh, but demands it raw, like a wolf, so that he may prepare it according to his own taste! Truly, he feasted sumptuously every day.

6. *nd there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus*, etc. [Lk 16.20] Compare anything you like with its opposite- gold and lead, for instance. The baseness of lead appears still baser when set beside the splendour of gold. The first character is just 'a rich man'; the second is named Lazarus. The first is rich, the other is a beggar. One is clothed in purple and fine linen, the other is full of sores. One feasts sumptuously every day, the other desired to be filled with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and no one did give him, moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. He could not rid himself of his sores by himself, and no-one came to tend him. Divine dispensation! The beggar is blessed and the wretched rich man is damned! "Nothing is more wretched than the happiness of sinners," says St Jerome[1] ; and St Augustine says[2] , "There is no surer sign of eternal damnation than to have temporal goods at your beck and call." God deprives his saints of temporal goods, lest they lose those that are eternal. As St Gregory says[3] , "We take coins away from children, so as to keep their inheritance complete."

*And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus*. That the poor humble man is favoured by God is shown by his very name. 'Lazarus' means 'helped', and he personifies all the poor of Jesus Christ, who helps them and uplifts them in their necessities. 'Beggar' and 'Lazarus' go together. The word for beggar, 'mendicant', indicates one who lacks what he needs to sustain life, so that he 'speaks with his hand' (*manu dicere*), following the age-old custom of the needy of shutting his mouth and holding out his hand. Spiritually, the poor person is helped by the Lord when he closes his mouth to words of bitterness,

and reaches out to God with a devout heart.

*He lay at the rich man's gate*. In a similar manner, the Ark of the Lord lay before Dagon [cf. 1Kg(Sm) 5.2]. But if you read attentively, you will see how their positions were reversed- Dagon was cast down and the Ark was lifted up. The poor man could not enter the rich man's door, and the rich man did not go out to bestow on him the blessing of food. How unlike Job, who said:

*The stranger did not stay without, my door was open to the traveller*; [Job 31.32]

and:

*If I have denied to the poor what they desired, and have made the eyes of the widow wait:*

*If I have eaten my morsel alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof*. [Job 31.16-17]

*Full of sores*. The ulcer that arises in the skin is full of putrefaction. Lazarus was full of sores, but soon he would be carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom.

*Desiring to be filled with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table and no one did give him*. Crumbs are the smallest particles of bread. The really poor person is satisfied with such a little, asks for such a little. Even a little, together with God's great grace, satisfies and refreshes him. But whoever will not give him even a crumb of bread will not deserve to receive even a drop of water.

*Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores*. We are told in the Gloss that even if we should see something reprehensible in a poor man, we ought not to despise him; for the medicine of poverty may avail to cure the sickness of sin. God executes a double judgement in a single circumstance: when a rich man sees a poor man and has no pity on him, he heaps up damnation to himself; while when a poor man sees the rich each day, he is tested and proved. It is a great trial, the experience of poverty and sickness on the one hand, and the sight of a rich man's wealth, who brings him no comfort, on the other.

The Introit of today's Mass well expresses the feelings of a man who is deprived of all human help, yet trusts in the mercy of God:

*Lord, I have trusted in thy mercy.*

*My heart shall rejoice in thy salvation:*

*I will sing to the Lord who giveth me good things*. [Ps 12.6]

He says three things: I have trusted, my heart shall rejoice, I will sing to the Lord. The truly poor man trusts in God's mercy, his heart rejoices even in the midst of this world's misery, and so he will sing to the Lord in everlasting glory.

**(A sermon on charity: *God is charity*.)**

7. The first part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this first clause: *God is charity* [1Jn 4.8]. Because charity is the greatest of all the virtues, we will offer a brief and particular sermon. We love God and our neighbour with the same love, the love which is the Holy Spirit, since God is charity. St Augustine says,[4] "The law of love is established by God, namely that you love God for his own sake and with all your heart, and your neighbour as yourself. You ought to love yourself by seeking what is for your good, for God's sake. In the same way you ought to love your neighbour by seeking what is for his good, not what is for his harm, also for God's sake. Your neighbour is every man; there is no one whom you ought to do harm to." The manner in which we should love God is implied in the words: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart* (understanding), *and with all thy soul* (will), *and with all thy mind* (memory). Our understanding, will and memory should be devoted to him from whom these powers come. There is no part of our life which is exempt. Whatever comes into our mind should be directed by love towards its final goal.

In today's Epistle, St John tells us much about the love of God and neighbour, and encourages us to practise it.

*By this hath the charity of God appeared towards us, because God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world,that we may live by him*. [1Jn 4.9]

How great is the love of the Father towards us! He sent his only-begotten Son to us and for us, so that as we live by him, so we may love him: for to live without him is in fact to die. *He that loveth not abideth in death* [1Jn 3.14]. If God loved us so much that he gave us his beloved Son, through whom he made the world, then we ought to love one another. *A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another* [Jn 13.34]. The rich man clad in purple did not keep this commandment, and so he remained in death. You might say that he was buried alive, because he lacked the true life which is love. He sins, by getting his priorities the wrong way round.

St Augustine says[5] : "There are four things that should be loved. One is above us, namely God. The second is what we ourselves are. The third is beside us, our neighbour. The fourth is below us, our body." The rich man loved his body first and foremost, and cared nothing for God, his own soul or his neighbour. That is why he was damned. St Bernard says[6] : "We should treat our body like some sick person in our care. There are many things it would like which are not good for it, and these we must deny it. There are many things which are good for it, but which it does not like- but we must insist on them. we should treat our body as something not really belonging to us, but to him by whom we are bought with a great price, that we may glorify him in our body [cf. 1Cor

6.20]." We should take care not to incur God's rebuke expressed by Ezekiel: *Because thou hast forgotten me and hast cast me off behind thy back, bear thou also thy wickedness and thy fornications* [Ezek 23.35]. We should love our bodies in the fourth and last place, "not as something for whose sake we live, but as something without which we cannot live." May he who lives for ever be pleased to lead us from this miserable bodily existence to the life which is himself, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

**(A moral sermon on the rich man (the body) and Lazarus (the sinful soul).)**

8. Morally*. There was a certain rich man*, etc. We will now take the rich man and Lazarus as standing for body and soul. Man, made of earthy, is earthy in respect of his body, of which Jeremiah says: *Cursed be the man that trusteth in man* [Jer 17.5], that is, in his body. Cursed is he that trusts in what is under a curse, as our body is cursed. Genesis says: *Cursed is the earth in thy work* [Gen 3.17], meaning that your body is cursed because of your sin of disobedience, your 'work'. What is the nature of this curse? *Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to thee* [Gen 3.18]. Hunger, thirst and the inevitability of death- these are the thorns. The temptations of the flesh, that trouble the soul, are the thistles. What fruit our cursed earth brings forth for us! Moses says in Deuteronomy*, Accursed is every one that hangeth on a tree* [Dt 21.23; cf. Gal 3.13]. Earthly love ties a man to this world's glory, as a hanged man is suspended by a rope from a dead tree, and so is cursed. This well applies to There was a certain rich man.

Alas! With what riches that man abounded and desired to abound! The whole world would not have been enough for him. So many possessions, such great riches- yet not enough for the little body of one man! When the wretched fellow came out of his mother's womb, he was not covered in purple and fine linen, just the bloody and sticky waters of birth! At the end of his life he goes naked and destitute into the earth. We can see this more clearly from his body's growth, maturity and decline.

Note that in maturity, the upper part of the body- from head to buttocks- is shorter than the lower part, down to the feet. In childhood the upper part is longer, while in old age the proportions are reversed. The reason for this difference is connected with the way a man moves at different ages, as he grows, becomes mature, and declines. At the beginning of infancy, the child goes on all fours, but little by little he learns to walk upright. However, when he reaches old age he becomes bent again. Our wretched body, at the beginning of its life, is small; in old age it is bent; but in between it is big with riches, adorned with fine raiment, and grows fat with feasting, like a pig with acorns. See how well this fits the passage: *There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day*.

**(A sermon on the pool and its five porches, and their meaning: *There was a pond called Probatica*.)**

9. There follows: *And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus*. Lazarus the beggar is

the wretched soul, poor and neglected, lying at the rich man's gate, full of sores. The rich man's gate means the five senses, and here the beggar soul lives, full of the sores of sin. St John says:

*There was at Jerusalem a pond, called Probatica, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick, of blind, of lame, of withered; waiting for the moving of the water*. [Jn 5.2-3]

The word for 'pond' strictly means 'fishpond', and this pool is the body, full of vain and useless thoughts like fishes. This fish pond has five porches, the five senses. The porches are like open doors, and the five senses lie open to vice. As Jeremiah says: *Death is come up through our windows* [Jer 9.21], and Nahum*: The gates of thy land shall be set wide open to thy enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars* [Nah 3.13]. When the fire of fleshly lust devours the bars- those gifts of grace and nature with which the gates of the soul are made secure- then those gates, the five bodily senses, are laid open to our enemies, the vices and demons. In these five porches the soul lies, sick, blind, lame and withered. Sick, because it is destitute of the strength that comes from virtue; blind, because it is deprived of the light of reason; lame in each foot, good will and good works; withered for lack of the moisture of contrition. Full of these sores it lies at the rich man's gate*, desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table*.

The table is worldly prosperity, and it has four legs: riches, honours, pleasures and bodily health. It is of this table that the Apostle warns the Corinthians:

*You cannot be partakers of the table of the Lord and of the table of devils.* [1Cor 10.22]

The Lord's table is poverty, in which he and his apostles partook. The table of devils is worldly prosperity, of which the prophet says:

*Let their table become as a snare before them;*

*and a recompense, and a stumbling block*. [Ps 68.23]

To carnal folk, prosperity is a snare of sin, an occasion of retribution from God (who repays the good things of the world with the evils of hell), and a stumbling block for their neighbour.

The crumbs falling from this table are impure thoughts, and all kinds of cares and pre-occupations that fester like worms in the sores of the soul. The wretched soul tries to find relief from them, but cannot. As Jeremiah says in Lamentations:

*They have given all their precious things for food to relieve the soul*. [Lam 1.11]

Their precious things are the virtues, which worldlings sell for food, for bodily delights

which do not satisfy, but which for a little while seem to offer relief to the soul.

**(A sermon for preachers: *The dogs came*.)**

10. Only one thing is left to comfort poor Lazarus, full of sores: the tongues of the dogs. *Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores*. The dogs that bark are preachers, of whom the Psalm says: *The tongue of thy dogs out of the enemies by him* [cf. Ps 67.24], meaning, ‘by the Lord’: those who were your enemies are made your friends, as happened when Saul became Paul. Just as the tongue of a dog has healing properties, so has the tongue of a preacher, who is a physician of the soul. Jeremiah asked:

*Is there no balm in Galaad? Or is there no physician there?*

*Why then is not the wound of the daughter of my people closed?* [Jer 8.22]

Galaad, ‘the mound of witness’, is Holy Church, in which the witness of the Scriptures is heaped up. In it is the balm of penance, and the physician who dispenses it is the preacher. Why then is the sore of the sinful soul not healed? Why is her wound not closed?

*The dogs came and licked his sores*. The word ‘licked’ suggests both eagerness and gentleness. The preacher should heal the sinner’s sores with the eager tongue of preaching, yet with gentleness, so that honey and milk are under his tongue [cf. Cant 4.11], sweet and soothing teaching. As the Apostle says: *If a man be overtaken in any fault, you who are spiritual instruct such a one in the spirit of meekness* [Gal 6.1].

Let us ask our Lord Jesus Christ to make that rich man, the wretched body, to accept poverty of his own free will, and to put on sack-cloth and ashes; and let us ask him to give him *spare bread and short water* [Is 30.20], to heal the sores of his soul with the tongue of preaching, and to place him in Abraham’s bosom. May he who is blessed for ever grant this prayer. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the rich man and the poor: *There were two women, Phenenna and Anna*.)**

11. There follows, secondly:

*And it came to pass that the beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom. And the rich man also died; and he was buried in hell*. [Lk 16.22]

So there was fulfilled what was spoken by Anna in the first book of Kings:

*The bow of the mighty is overcome; and the weak are girt with strength... etc., up to: to hold the throne of glory.* [1Kg(Sm) 2.4,8]

There is a **concordance** to this Gospel text at the beginning of the first book of Kings, where it speaks of the two women, Phenenna and Anna:

*Phenenna had children: but Anna had no children... Her rival (Phenenna) also afflicted her, and troubled her exceedingly, insomuch as she upbraided her, that the Lord had shut up her womb.... and thus she provoked her. But Anna wept, and did not eat*. [1Kg (Sm) 1.2,6,7]

Phenenna, whose name means ‘conversion’, represents the rich man clad in purple, whose conversion to the world rather than to God led not to heaven but to hell. Anna, whose name means ‘grace’, stands for Lazarus the beggar, who was led by the grace of God and so passed to glory, both grace and glory being the Lord’s gift to him.

Phenenna had children, children to love. The rich man had as many ‘children’ as he had works begotten of fleshly love and worldly vanity. He was like Jerobaal the son of Joas, in the book of Judges, who *had seventy sons, who came out of his thigh; for he had many wives* [Jg 8.30]. Phenenna’s seven sons (according to the "History"[7] ) and Jerobaal’s seventy have the same meaning: seven is the number indicating completeness, in this case fulness of vice. Jerobaal means ‘superior’, and Joas, ‘temporal’. The rich man was superior to Lazarus in this world. His offspring, in temporal succession, was a world of vice, which he begot from his ‘wives’, pride, gluttony, avarice and vainglory.

Anna had no children. She was barren. Lazarus the beggar, the just man, has no evil deeds as children. He is barren, and without fruit. *No corn, wine and oil are multiplied for him* [cf. Ps 4.8], no wheat of ostentatious riches, no wine of carnal pleasure, no oil of sumptuous feasting. These three were multiplied to that rich man, that certain man, his wealth heaped up like corn, wine empurpling his lips, rich food every day! Because these increased for him in this life, he was buried in hell. The poor man, however, could say: *In peace in the selfsame I will sleep, and I will rest* [Ps 4.9], in Abraham’s bosom.

Phenenna behaved badly to Anna in four ways: she afflicted her, troubled her, upbraided her and provoked her. In the same way the rich man behaved badly to Lazarus. He afflicted him by depriving him of the benefit he should have given him. Isaiah says of those who do not give the poor the things they have a right to:

*The spoil of the poor is in your house.*

*Why do you consume my people, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord*. [Is 3.14-15]

He troubled him, putting him down by showing him up. There is no more convincing way

to demonstrate the baseness of lead, than by putting it alongside gold. In the same way, poverty is shown up by riches. The very abundance of the rich man is an offence to the poor. The rich man upbraided him, upbraided Lazarus, full of sores and lying at his gate, every time he passed by him, dressed in purple. Yet by so doing he provoked him to love God the more.

Therefore *Anna wept and did not eat*. Lazarus wept for the misery of this life, and for the glory that was delayed; and he did not eat, because though he desired to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, no-one would give him any. How long, O Lord, will the one prosper and the other be afflicted? *Why doth the way of the wicked prosper?* asks Jeremiah [Jer 12.1]. Why is it well with all them that transgress and do wickedly? And Habbakuk asks: *Why lookest thou not upon them that do unjust things and holdest thy peace when the wicked devoureth the man that is more just than himself?* [Hab 1.13]. Tell me, Lord Jesus: how long shall this be?

**(A sermon on the damnation of the rich man and the glory of the poor man: *Dagon lay on the ground*; and: *I shall die in my nest*.)**

12. *And it came to pass that the beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. And the rich man also died; and he was buried in hell*. [Lk 16.22]

There you see:

*The bow of the mighty is overcome; and the weak are girt with strength... etc., up to: to hold the throne of glory*. [1Kg(Sm) 2.4,8]

There is a **concordance** to this in the first book of Kings, where it tells how Dagon:

*lay upon his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord. And the head of Dagon, and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold: and only the stump of Dagon remained in its place*. [1Kg(Sm) 5.4-5]

The ark of the Lord is Lazarus. In him, as in the ark, there are three things, manna, tablets and rod: the manna of patience, the tablets of the love of God and neighbour, and the rod of discipline. This ark rested in Abraham's bosom, and Dagon lay prostrate before it. Dagon, 'the Sorrowful Fish', is the rich man, purple-clad, who swam like a fish in this sorrowful world, and then in hell. His head and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold. Head and hands are worldly excellence, power and abundance; the threshold is the way out of life, the entrance to death. When Dagon fell, when the rich man died, his head and hands- all his honours, power and wealth- were cut off from him and remained upon the threshold of death; while he himself, like a stump, alone, naked and empty, was buried in the place due to him- hell. How truly said: *The rich man died and was buried in hell.*

How great is God's justice! The beggar lay at the rich man's gate, full of sores. Now the

rich man lies alone, like a stump. In Proverbs, Solomon says:

*The evil shall fall down before the good:*

*and the wicked before the gates of the just*. [Prov 14.19]

Lazarus died in the little nest of poverty, of which Job says:

*I shall die in my nest, and as a palm-tree shall multiply my days*. [Job 29.18]

The man who dies in the nest of poverty will be planted like a palm tree in the house of eternity and eternal greenness: *The just shall flourish like the palm-tree* [Ps 91.13].

**(A sermon on the burial of the wicked man: *Thus saith the Lord concerning Joachim*; and: *When a man shall die* )**

13. *The rich man was buried in hell*. Jeremiah says of this burial:

*Thus saith the Lord concerning Joakim the son of Josias king of Juda: They shall not mourn for him, Alas, my brother, and, Alas, sister: they shall not lament for him, Alas, my lord, or, Alas, the noble one. He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, rotten and cast forth without the gates of Jerusalem*. [Jer 22.18-19]

When an ass dies, its master keeps its hide and gives its flesh to the dogs. The bones, which remain a long time, represent the soul. Thus the hide, external goods, goes to the children; worms eat the flesh; and the devil gets his soul. As Ecclesiasticus says: *When a man shall die, beasts and serpents and worms shall inherit him* [cf. Ecclus 10.13]. The beasts are his rapacious children, the serpents are the demons, and then there are the worms! Such is the burial of the rich man clad in purple, who was buried in hell.

The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause:

*In this is the charity of God perfected in us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgement; because as he is, we also are in this world*. [1Jn 4.17]

The Gloss says, ‘This is the evidence that we love God perfectly, that we are not afraid of the coming of the Judge, or of appearing before the Judge.’ Because the beggar Lazarus loved God perfectly, he was not afraid of the coming of the Judge, whom he expected to reward him rather than condemn. But there was no love in the purple-clad rich man, so he had no confidence in the day of judgement, because he had refused to take pity on the poor man. The righteous have confidence on the grounds that they imitate his perfect love, by loving even their enemies in this world. Even so, he who is in heaven *raineth upon the just and the unjust* [Mt 5.45].

We pray, Lord Jesus, we your poor and needy ones, that you will make us die like Lazarus the beggar in the nest of poverty, and be taken by the angels to Abraham's bosom. Grant this, O you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A sermon against detractors: *Be not in the feasts of great drinkers*; and the three-fold sword of detraction.)**

14. There follows, thirdly:

*And, lifting up his eyes when he was in torments, he saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom; and he cried and said: Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame*. [Lk 16.23-24]

The rich man lifted up his eyes, but in vain, since he had *set his eyes bowing down to the earth* [Ps 16.11]. Isaiah says:

*We shall look towards the land, and behold darkness of tribulation:*

*and the light is darkened with the mist thereof*. [Is 5.30]

Because the rich man looked to the love of earthy things, darkness of tribulation covered him, and his light, his prosperity, was darkened in hell. *He saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom*. The book of Wisdom testifies how great is the affliction of evil people at seeing the joy of the good:

*These seeing it shall be troubled with terrible fear,*

*and shall be amazed at the suddenness of their unexpected salvation.*

*Saying within themselves, repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit:*

*These are they whom we had some time in derision and for a parable of reproach.*

*We fools esteemed their life madness and their end without honour.*

*Behold how they are numbered among the children of God,*

*and their lot is among the saints*. [Wisd 5.2-5]

*And he cried and said: Father Abraham*, etc. He begged a drop of water, who would not

give a crumb of bread. He desired to be given a drop of water from Lazarus' finger, who would not give him the crumbs falling from his table. We speak of a 'fingertip', not because Lazarus had fingers any more, but to show that the rich man would have counted even the least help, just the dipping of a finger, to be a great benefit- if only he could have what he wanted.

*To cool my tongue*. He had no tongue, but he was being punished for sins of the tongue! As revellers do, he gave free rein to his tongue. He was tormented even before his judgement, for to a glutton the mere lack of delicacies is a punishment. He sinned not only in the vice of gluttony, but in sins of the tongue committed in the course of his revels. Solomon warns in Proverbs [23.20]:

*Be not in the feasts of great drinkers, nor in their revellings, who contribute flesh to eat*.

By speaking ill of their neighbour, they eat not only flesh, but even dung! They not only belittle good deeds, they tell lies. In so doing, they eat not just animal flesh, but- abominably- human flesh. In other words, they tear the praiseworthy works of their brothers with the teeth of detraction. Alas! How many religious nowadays abstain from eating meat, yet rend their brethren with the teeth of detraction? Seneca[8] says of them, "They stink below, and also above." And St Bernard[9] says, "I can hardly say which is more damnable- to speak detraction or to listen to it;" and, "The tongue of a detractor is a triple blade, for it slays three people at one blow"- that is, the speaker, the listener, and the one spoken against, when he hears what has been said.

**(A note on how, for one living in mortal sin, deeds that are good according to their kind are useful in five ways.)**

15. There follows:

*And Abraham said to him: Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is fixed a great chaos; so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor from thence come hither*. [Lk 1625-26]

The rich man had had something of good; he had done good things, in a general way, though not from charity, and the abundance of divine mercy had rewarded him with temporal goods.

*And likewise Lazarus evil things*. He accepted the evil of adversity as his just due for such evil as he had done, in respect of venial sin. Now he is comforted and thou art tormented. We should note that, for a person living in mortal sin, the generally good things he does are beneficial in five ways. First, they make the sinner fitter to receive grace; secondly, they serve to give a good example to his neighbour; thirdly, they accustom him to good; fourthly, they earn the reward of temporal benefits, as with this

rich man; and fifthly, they lessen the pains of hell if he dies in mortal sin.

There follows Abraham's reply to the rich man's plea: *Between us and you*, etc. The damned would like to pass from punishment to the glory of the saints; and the just, with compassionate hearts, would gladly go to those in torment, to free them. But they cannot, because the souls of the just, although of the goodness of their nature they have compassion, are yet bound by such devotion to the justice of the Creator that they can show no compassion to the damned. There is a chaos between the poor man and the rich, so that they who would pass, etc.: indicating that after death one's just deserts cannot be altered.

**(A sermon against those who live in riches and delights, which they will soon lack: *David took the spear and cup of water*.)**

16. There is a **concordance** to this in the first book of Kings:

*David took the spear, and the cup of water which was at Saul's head... When David was gone over to the other side, and stood on the top of the hill afar off, and a good space was between them, he cried to Abner, saying: ...See now. Where is the king's spear, and the cup of water, which was at his head?* [1Kg(Sm) 26.12-13,14,16]

David means 'strong-armed', and Saul is 'abuser'. The spear stands for riches and the cup of water for the pleasures of gluttony. David is the beggar Lazarus, who was strong in hardship and adversity; Saul is the rich man in purple, who misused the goods given him by God. David took Saul's spear and water-jug; and in a sense Lazarus took away from Saul the spear of the power of riches and the water of gluttonous pleasure, by refusing to have pity on him. Lazarus passed from adversity to rest, and stood on the top of a hill far off, that is, he rested in Abraham's bosom, far from the pains of the rich man. *And lifting up his eyes from afar,* etc.: David cried to Abner: *See where is the king's spear, and the cup of water, which was at his head?* O you fine rich man,, where now is the spear of riches, with which you used to strike the poor? Where is the jug of water, the pleasure of gluttony? Let it wet your tongue now, tortured in the flame! Yes, indeed: He is comforted and you are tormented.

The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this third clause:

*Fear is not in charity; but perfect charity casteth out fear, because fear hath pain. And he that feareth is not perfected in charity.* [1Jn 4.18]

There was no fear in the charity of Lazarus the beggar; perfect charity cast it out. As the Gloss says, 'Charity makes us not fear present troubles.' The rich man's fear, the fear of losing what he had, brought him to the penalty of death.

We pray you, Lord Jesus Christ, to free us from the unquenchable fire, and to place us with Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. Grant this, O you who are blessed for ever and ever.

Amen.

[FOURTH CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the Father's house, and on the five rich brothers: *I beseech thee, father*.)**

17. There follows, fourthly:

*Then, father, I beseech thee that wouldst send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torments*. [Lk 16.27-28]

Too late, this rich man would like to start being a teacher, when before he had had no time for learning or teaching. When he had lost all hope for himself, this rich man, burning in hell, took thought for his family, saying: *Then, father, I beseech thee*. Notice his father, his house and his five brothers. The rich man's father was the devil, whom he took after. His house was the world and worldly folk, among whom are his five brothers, all those devoted to the five bodily senses. The rich man sees that he has been damned on account of these five senses, dear as brothers to him. So he, who has had no pity on himself, seeks to forewarn, by a kind of mercy, those still devoted to the senses. Sinners love their bodily senses like brothers; good people treat them as servants.

**(A sermon on the slavery of the five senses: *Abigail arose and made haste*.)**

There is a **concordance** to this in the first book of Kings, where it says that:

*Abigail arose, and made haste, and got upon an ass: and five damsels went with her, her waiting maids; and she followed the messengers of David, and became his wife*. [1Kg (Sm) 25.42]

Abigail means 'joy of my father', and she represents the penitent soul over whom there is joy in heaven. She rode upon an ass, controlling her body; and with her went five damsels that waited upon her, the five bodily senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, which stand for understanding, obedience, discrimination, the pursuit of truth and virtuous action. With these, she follows David's messengers, the poverty, humility and Passion of Jesus Christ, which bring us tidings of what he was like in this world. In this way she became his wife, betrothed to him with the ring of a well-formed faith.

18. There follows:

*And Abraham said to him: They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them. But he said: No, father Abraham; but if one went to them from the dead, they will do penance. And he said to him: If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they*

*believe if one rise again from the dead*. [Lk 16.29-31]

It is clear that the rich man was Jewish, since his brothers were subject to the Law of Moses and to the prophets. That is why Abraham calls him 'son', and he calls Abraham 'father'. He who had despised God's words himself, did not think his followers would hear them either. Those who despise the words of the Law will find it still harder to fulfil the precepts of the Redeemer, who rose from the dead, for these precepts are even more demanding. And if they refuse to obey his words, they will surely refuse to believe in him. Those who give themselves to the flesh and to the senses will listen neither to Moses- the prelates of Holy Church- nor to the prophets- her preachers. Worse still, they will not believe Christ as he rises from the dead. Saul believed Samuel, when he had been called up by the divining spirit. Shall we not believe Christ, truly rising by the power of God the Father?

There is a **concordance** to this in the first book of Kings. Saul said to the woman with the divining spirit;

*Divine to me by thy divining spirit, and bring me up him whom I shall tell thee... And the woman said to him: Whom shall I bring up to thee? And he said: Bring me up Samuel. And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice, and said to Saul: Why hast thou deceived me? For thou art Saul. And the king said to her: Fear not. What hast thou seen?* [1Kg(Sm) 28.11-13]

The woman told him she had seen an old and glorious man, wrapped in a priestly mantle; and when Saul understood that it was Samuel, he fell down before him. According to Josephus, the soul of Samuel asked, "Why have you disturbed my rest, that I should be raised up?" According to the "Histories"[10], some say regarding this raising that an evil spirit appeared in the form of Samuel, or that it was an illusion that Saul took to be Samuel. Some say that it was only Samuel's soul, wearing the likeness of a body by God's permission; while yet others say that it was only his body, animated with that life-principle which we share with animals, while his soul rested in its own place.

Whatever about this, let us treat our bodily senses as servants, not brothers. Let us listen to Moses and the prophets, and let us believe Christ who is risen from the dead and is seated at God's right hand. And as we believe him, let us love those who believe.

19. And so the fourth part of the Epistle is **concordant** with this fourth clause:

*Let us therefore love God; because God hath first loved us. If any man say: I love God, and hateth his brother; he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he seeth, how can he love God whom he seeth not?* [1Jn 4.19-20]

St Augustine[11] tells us, "If someone loved someone else, whom he saw with human sight, with a spiritual love: he would in fact see God, who is love itself, with that inner sight by which alone he can be seen. But he who does not love the brother he sees, how

can he love God? He who does not love his brother lacks the love which is God."

Beloved brethren, let us ask the God who is love to give us love for the poverty of Lazarus the beggar, and abhorrence for the wealth of the rich man clad in purple; and to deliver us from burial in hell, and to place us in Abraham's bosom. May he grant this, to whom be honour and glory, dignity and kingship, for ever and ever. And let every truly poor person say, Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] Or rather, AUGUSTINE, *Epistola* 138.14; PL 33.531

[2] cf. GREGORY, *Moralia* XXVI 18,33; PL 76.368

[3] cf. GREGORY, *Pastoral Rule* III,26; PL 77.100

[4] Though Antony quotes AUGUSTINE, this whole section is heavily dependent upon PETER LOMBARD, *Sentences* III, dist. 27.5, through whom Antony derives the quotation

[5] P. LOMBARD, *Sentences* III, dist 28,1

[6] BERNARD= GUIGO, *Ad fratres de Monte Dei* I,7,18; PL 184.320

[7] cf. PETER COMESTOR, *Historia Scholastica*, *Lib. I Regum*, 4; PL 198.1298

[8] Perhaps cf. P. SYRUS, *Mimi*, 338

[9] BERNARD, *De consideratione* II,22; PL 182.756; *De diversis, sermo* 17,4; PL 183.585

[10] cf. PETER COMESTOR, *Historia Scholastica, Lib I Reg*, 26; PL 198.1321

[11] cf. PETER LOMBARD, *Sentences* III, dist. 27,3

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the second Sunday after Pentecost: A certain man made a great supper, which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon on the battle between the demons and the just*: The Philistines gathering together*.)**

1. At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: *A certain man made a great supper, and invited many. And he sent his servant at the hour of supper to say to them that were invited, that they should come.* [Lk 14.16-17]

In the first book of Kings it says:

*Now the Philistines, gathering together their troops to battle, assembled at Socho of Juda, and camped between Socho and Azeca in the borders of Dommim. And Saul and the children of Israel being gathered together came to the valley of Terebinth: and they set the army in array to fight against the Philistines*. [1Kg(Sm) 17.1-2]

Philistine means ‘falling from drink’, Socho is ‘tents’, Juda is ‘confession’, Azeca is ‘deceit’, and Dommim is ‘red’. Thus the Philistines represent the demons who, drunk with pride, fell from heaven. They gather their forces and assemble for battle in ‘Socho of Juda’, to battle against those who are camped in the tents of penitence; these are ‘between Socho and Azeca in the borders of Dommim’, because the demons fight against just men to deceive them with their wicked suggestions and, if they succeed in deceiving them, lead them into the blood of sin.

It says, too, in the third book of Kings that *the dogs licked the blood of Ahab* [cf. 3(1)Kg 22.38], the dogs being the demons who lick the blood of Ahab (‘brotherhood of fatherhood’), of the man who used to live in the brotherhood of penitents who have one God and Father. The children of Israel, true preachers gathered in unity of faith, must set their minds and preaching in array, to fight against the demons. But where? In the valley of Terebinth, of course- that is, in the humility of the Cross, from which flows forth the most precious resin of Jesus Christ’s blood; of him who says in today’s Gospel: *A certain man made a great supper*, etc.

2. There are three things to note in this Gospel. First, the preparation of the great supper and the invitation to it by the servant: *A certain man*. Second, the excuses of those invited: *And they began all at once to make excuse*. Third, the bringing in to the supper of the poor, the feeble, the blind and the lame: *Then the master of the house, being angry*. We will **concord** with these three clauses certain stories from the first book of Kings.

This Sunday we sing in the Introit of the Mass: *The Lord is made my protector*; and the Epistle of St John is read: *Wonder not if the world hate you*; which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the three clauses of the Gospel. The first is: *Wonder not*; the second: *In this we have known*; the third: *He that hath the substance of this world*.

[THE FIRST CLAUSE

**(A sermon for religious: *Anna gave her son suck*.)**

3. Let us say, then: *A certain man made a great supper*. This supper is two-fold: that of penitence and that of glory. Since we cannot come to the second without the first, let us prepare the first one, and see what foods are necessary for it.

There is a **concordance** to this in the first book of Kings:

*Anna gave her son suck, till she weaned him. And after she had weaned him, she carried him with her, with three calves, and three bushels of flour, and a bottle of wine, and she brought him to the house of the Lord in Silo*. [1Kg(Sm) 1.23-24]

Anna (whose name means 'grace') stands for the grace of the Holy Spirit, who suckles the penitent with the two breasts of prevenient and subsequent grace, until he is altogether weaned from the milk of carnal desire and worldly vanity. When a mother wants to wean her child, she puts a bitter ointment on her nipple. The child finds bitterness where it expected sweetness, and so is weaned from the milk it enjoys. In the same way, the grace of the Holy Spirit anoints the breast of temporal things with the bitterness of tribulation, so that by this bitterness man may be induced to reject the desired delight, and turn instead to that which is true.

*And after she had weaned him, she carried him with three calves*. These are the foods we need to prepare for the supper of penitence. Grace takes the penitent with three calves, a threefold offering. The first is the calf of a broken and a contrite heart: as the Psalm says*, Then shall they lay calves upon thy altar* [Ps 50.21]. Penitents offer calves upon the altar of a contrite heart by sacrificing their lustful and unclean thoughts. The second calf is confession. Hosea says, towards the end:

*Take with you words and return to the Lord and say to him:*

*Take away all iniquity and receive the good:*

*and we will render the calves of our lips.*[Hos 14.3]

We take words with us when we try to fulfil what we have heard, and so turn to the Lord, saying to him, ‘Take away all the iniquity that we have done, and receive the good which you have given us.’ *Not to me Lord, not to me, but to thy name give glory* [cf. Ps 113.9]. In this way we offer you the calves of our lips, the confession of sin and of praise. The third calf is our body, mortified by penance. The calf or the heifer is a young animal- it represents our flesh, which in youth runs riot in the fields of wantonness. Samson says, in Judges*: If you had not ploughed with my heifer, you had not found out my riddle* [Jg 15.18]. Samson represents the spirit, while the heifer is our flesh. We plough with it when we afflict it, and so we answer the riddle, What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion (the lion of the tribe of Judah)? What is sweeter than the honey of contemplation? What is stronger than the preacher at whose roar all stand still? What is sweeter than the honey of meekness? What stronger than the lion of severity? So it is well put: *She carried him with three calves*.

*And three bushels of flour*. Wheat is ground and broken down into flour. Flour mixed with water is baked into bread, which *strengthens man’s heart* [Ps 103.15]. In the same way the grain of our work has to be ground and broken down in the examination of our conscience, that it may be purified like flour. This examination must be three-fold, measure in three bushels. We must examine the nature of the act itself, its origin and its purpose. Then the work must be mixed with the water of tears, to be lamented by *the upper and nether watery ground* [Jg 1.15]. We offer our work either to make amends for the evil we have already done, or for desire of eternal joy. The Law prescribes the offering of *two turtle-doves, one for sin and one for a holocaust* [cf. Lev 12.8]. Bread is made from flour and water, to strengthen man’s heart, because his conscience is fed by work and tears combined.

*And a bottle of wine*. The amphora contained three measures. Wine represents gladness of mind, springing from the testimony of a good conscience, concern for one’s neighbour’s welfare, and in the hope of eternal joy. With all these things mother Anna, the grace of the Holy Spirit, takes her son, the righteous man, up to the house of the Lord in Silo, ‘translated’ to eternal life. Thither the saints are translated from their earthly pilgrimage, and there they feast with the blessed angels in its glory.

**(A sermon on the banquet of heavenly glory: *The Lord of hosts shall make*.)**

4. In days gone by, supper was the one meal in the day, usually in the evening, when everyone came together to eat. The supper represents the refreshment of eternal glory, in which the saints are satisfied together with the vision of God, who rewards with the same wage all those who labour in the vineyard [cf. Mt 20.2]. Isaiah says of this banquet:

*The Lord of hosts shall make unto all the people, in this mountain, a feast of fat things:*

*a feast of wine, of fat things full of marrow, of wine purified from the lees.* [Is 25.6]

See how well the Gospel is **concordant** with Isaiah: the Lord says, *A man made a great supper*; Isaiah says, *The Lord of hosts shall make*... etc. One speaks of a great supper, the other of a feast of fat things.

Note these four: feast, fat things, full of marrow, wine purified from the lees. The feast, which is for many people, is the glorious company of all the saints. The 'fat things' refers to their charity, the 'marrow' to the joy of souls in the vision of God; the purified wine to the glorification of their bodies. In this mountain, the heavenly Jerusalem, the Lord of the angelic hosts will make a feast of fat things, a gathering of all the saints who are full of a rich charity, full of the inexpressible joy of the vision of God, and blessed with the glorification of their bodies. There will be purified wine indeed! The vintage of the grapes is refined by being strained of imperfection. In the vintage of the general resurrection, the bodies of the saints will be gathered and refined, purified from everything corruptible and mortal, and stored in the heavenly cellars. How well said, then: A certain man made a great supper!

Note also that at the great supper we eat a substantial meal, those fruits which the children of Israel brought from the land of promise, grapes and figs and pomegranates, as the book of Numbers tells [cf. Num 13.24]. The grapes, from which wine is pressed, stand for the joy which the saints have in the vision of the incarnate Word. Mere men see God as a man, though angels do not see God as an angel, and they see their own nature raised above the angels. Habbakuk says of this joy:

*I will rejoice in the Lord: and I will joy in God my Jesus*. [Hab 3.18]

He says rightly, 'my Jesus'; who to save me, took 'me' (that is, my flesh) from me, and raised me above the angels.

The fruitful fig, sweeter than all fruits, represents the delight that the saints have from the vision of the whole Trinity. The prophet says:

*O how great is the multitude of thy sweetness, O Lord,*

*which thou hast hidden for them that fear thee!* [Ps 30.20]

You have hidden it, so that it may more fervently be sought, that being sought it may be found, being found more dearly loved, and being loved eternally possessed. *O God, thou hast provided for the poor* [Ps 67.11]. The psalmist does not say what he has prepared, because words cannot express what he has prepared. The Apostle speaks of *what eye has not seen* (because it is hidden), *what ear has not heard* (because it is silent and cannot be uttered), and *what has not entered into the heart of man* (because it is beyond our comprehension) [cf. 1Cor 2.9].

The pomegranates represent both the unity of the Church Triumphant and the diversity of rewards. The pomegranate contains within itself sweet-scented seeds. All these seeds are hidden under the skin of the pomegranate, and yet each seed has a distinct cell. In the same way, in eternal life all the saints have a single glory, and yet according to the deeds of each they receive a greater or a lesser reward. That is why the Lord says: *In my Father's house* (the 'skin') *there are many mansions* (the distinct cells) [Jn 14.2].

**(A sermon for penitents: *The Lord, the God of hosts shall call*.)**

5. See then what kind of foods we eat in the great supper, of which is said: A certain man made a great supper. This man is Jesus Christ, God and man, who made a great supper, of penitence and of glory, but many despise his invitation. As the book of Proverbs says:

*I called and you refused. I stretched out my hand, and there was none that regarded.* [Prov 1.24]

The Word of the Father called both in his own person and through the words of others, and they refuse to come. He stretched out his hand upon the cross, do bestow so many benefits, and no-one regards it. But the time will come when that outstretched hand will become *a fist to smite the wicked* [cf. Is 58.41].

The Lord calls us to the first supper, of repentance. Isaiah says:

*The Lord, the God of hosts, in that day shall call to weeping and to mourning:*

*to baldness and to girding with sack-cloth*. [Is 22.12]

In these four, true penitence is contained: weeping (contrition), mourning (confession), baldness (renunciation of temporal things), and sack-cloth (satisfaction). The Lord calls men to this supper, but they will not come because they make another supper for themselves, of which it is said:

*And behold, joy and gladness, killing calves and slaying rams, eating flesh and drinking wine: Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die.* [Is 22.13]

The Lord also invites men to the supper of eternal glory. In the book of Ezra it says that:

*Cyrus made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and in writing also, saying: Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him. Let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judea, and build the house of the Lord, the God of Israel. He is the God that is in Jerusalem*. [Ez 1.1,3]

Cyrus (meaning ‘inheritance’) stands for Jesus Christ our inheritance. The prophet says*: My inheritance is goodly to me* [Ps 15.6], better than all the saints put together. He commands all the people to go up to the heavenly Jerusalem, *built as a city* [Ps 121.3] of smooth stones, the souls of the just. But, in the prophet Haggai, the people say: *The time is not yet come for building the house of the Lord* [Hag 1.2].

The Lord, whose mercies cannot be numbered, calls not only in his own person, but by the duly appointed preachers, referred to by the words: And he sent his servant at the hour of supper to say to them that were invited that they should come, *for now all things are ready* [Lk 14.17]. The Gloss says that supper-time is the end of this age. The Apostle says to the Corinthians that we are *those upon whom the ends of the world are come* [1Cor 10.11]. At this end the servant (the preaching order) is sent to those who have been invited by the Law and the Prophets, to tell them to stop delaying and get ready to partake of the supper, because everything is now prepared. Christ has been sacrificed, the entrance to the kingdom stands open. Christ’s Passion is the opening of the Kingdom, and through it the Church and the righteous man, who have entered the first supper and are to enter the second, say in the Introit of today’s Mass:

*The Lord became my protector, and he brought me forth into a large place:*

*he saved me, because he was well pleased with me.* [Ps 17.19-20]

With arms outstretched upon the cross, the Lord became my protector in his Passion; he brought me forth into a large place in the sending of the Holy Spirit; and he saved me when the enemy assailed me because it pleased him that I should enter the supper of eternal life.

The first part of today’s Epistle is **concordant** with this first clause of the Gospel. John says to those who sit down together at the banquet of eternal life:

*Wonder not, brothers, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren*. [1Jn 3.13-14]

The world, or rather those who love the world, hates the citizens of eternal life. No wonder, because they even hate themselves! *He that is evil to himself, to whom will he be good*? [Ecclus 14.5]. There is a **concordance** to this in the first book of Kings:

*Saul became David’s enemy continually; ...And Saul did not look on David with a good eye from that day and forward*.[1Kg(Sm) 18.29,9]

Wonder not if the world hates you. We know we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. The love of brothers is the entrance to the supper of eternal life.

So let us ask the Lord Jesus Christ, dearest brothers, to lead us into the supper of

penitence, and from there transfer us to the supper of eternal glory. May he grant this, who is blessed and glorious for ever and ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A sermon against care for temporal things: I have bought a farm; and: The ark of the covenant of the Lord.)**

6. There follows, secondly:

*And they began all at once to make excuse. The first said to him: I have bought a farm and I must needs go out and see it; I pray thee, hold me excused. And another said: I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to try them; I pray thee, hold me excused. And another said: I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. And the servant, returning, told these things to his lord.* [Lk 14.18-21]

We must look at these three things: the farm, the five yoke of oxen, and the wife.

The ‘farm’ would have been a piece of ground surrounded by a wall or ditch. It represents the love of domination, of which St Bernard[1] says, "I do not fear fire and sword as greatly as the lust to dominate." Those who burn with it wall themselves round with riches and honours. This is the farm Gethsemane, wherein our Lord was betrayed and bound. The name means ‘vale of fat things’- a low place into which refuse drains, to make it ‘rich’. Thus in the farm ‘Gethsemane’ (in those who want to lord it over others rather than serve them, and who take their ease in the vale of carnal pleasure, besmeared like pigs with the filth of temporal riches) Jesus Christ is betrayed: that is, the faith of Jesus Christ is destroyed. Faith rejects temporal goods, and does not wish to dominate. It is content with subjection, and grows from being despised. This farm Gethsemane is ‘bought’ (and would that it could not be had at any price!), because it forces a man to go out from the inward contemplation of God to outward cares.

There is a **concordance** in the first book of Kings, where it says that:

*The ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, sitting upon the cherubims... was come into the camp... And the ark was taken by the Philistines*. [cf. 1Kg(Sm) 4.4,5,11]

The ark is the contemplative man, in whom is the manna of sweetness, the tablets of the two-fold law, and the rod of correction. He is called ‘the ark of the covenant of the Lord’, because he enters into a covenant to serve the Lord for ever. The Lord ‘sits upon the cherubims’, spirits full of knowledge: that is, upon the soul that is full of charity, since charity is the fulfilling of the law. Under the compulsion of sin, this ark goes out from the Holy of holies, the hidden face of God, and enters the camp, buys a farm, and desires to be superior. When it is lifted up like this, it is captured by the demons and taken to Azotus (‘fire’), the heat of carnal desire. And so he says: *I have bought a farm*.

**(A sermon against the lust for domination: *Saul, compelled by necessity*.)**

7. *And I must needs go out and see it*. Notice the words, ‘I must needs’, ‘go out’ and ‘see’. Whoever acquires the farm of earthly dominion finds himself under necessity. Whereas he was free, he has made himself subject to a wretched slavery. In this way, as the first book of Kings tells, Saul was compelled by necessity to go down to the woman with the divining spirit who lived at Endor. That is why he said:

*I am in great distress; for the Philistines fight against me; and God is departed from me, and would not hear me.* [1Kg(Sm) 28.15]

The farm and the divining woman have the same meaning. Endor means ‘spring of generation’, and it stands for Adam, the fount and origin of the human race. He was given paradise as his endowment, but chose to spend it in buying the farm of domination, after hearing the lying words: *You shall be as gods* [Gen 3.5]. Whoever seeks to dominate is walking according to the old man, not *the new Man, Jesus Christ* [cf. Col 3.9,10]. As John tells us, when Jesus knew that men would come to take him by force and make him king, he fled into the mountain [cf. Jn 6.15]. The art of consulting the dead was called ‘pythonism’ (divination), and so the woman who knew how to do it was said to be a ‘pythoness’. Alas! How many religious, dead to the world and buried in the cloister, does this woman, the love of domination, raise from the sleep of contemplation, from rest and peace, and bring into public view! As Isaiah says:

*Thou shalt be brought down: thou shalt speak out of the earth.*

*And thy speech shall be heard out of the ground:*

*and thy voice shall be from the earth like that of the python:*

*and out of the ground thy speech shall mutter.* [Is 29.4]

This is what happens to the man who buys a farm or consults a pythoness, who comes out of the quiet of the grave. You shall be humbled and brought down, you who thought to rise! You shall speak out of the earth, of earthly things, you who once used to speak about heavenly things. Your speech, which once uttered burning words regarding the soul’s delight and abstinence from greed, shall be heard out of the ground, talking of the belly, of gluttony, and fine foods and drinks. Your voice shall be from the earth, from prelacy, like a python; and your speech shall mutter out of the ground, grumbling where once you found your strength *in silence and in hope* [cf. Is 30.15]. What ‘needs’! What perversity! *I bought a field, and I must needs go...*

Go? In Genesis, we read how Esau went forth, a farmer and hunter; while Jacob, a simple man, stayed at home and took his blessing by stealth [cf. Gen 25.27-33]. When someone, from love of temporal things, goes chasing off after a farm, or to consult a

pythoness, he leaves the quietude of his soul and, without a doubt, his eternal blessing is taken away. I must need go out and see it, see it just once, before I die! This is the only fruit of riches, as Ecclesiastes says:

*Where there are great riches, there are also many to eat them.*

*And what doth it profit the owner, but that he seeth the riches with his eyes?* [Eccles 5.10]

There you have it! He who buys the field of earthly domination does not come to the Lord's supper, but makes a false excuse, saying: *I pray thee, hold me excused*! His words sound humble, with his 'I pray you'; but there is pride in his heart, and he is too proud to come. He often says to the just man, 'Pray for me, I am a sinner.' It sounds humble, this asking for prayers; but the pride is still there, because he does not reject his sin. There is a **concordance** to this in the first book of Kings, where Saul says to Samuel:

*But now bear, I beseech thee, my sin: and return with me, that I may adore the Lord.* [1Kg(Sm) 15.25]

**(A sermon on the five yoke of oxen, and their meaning: *I have bought five yoke of oxen*.)**

8. *And another said: I have bought five yoke of oxen*, etc. The five yoke of oxen stand for the five senses of the body. As oxen are yoked together, so in pairs the organs of our senses serve us. There are two ears, two eyes, two nostrils; two organs of taste, the tongue and the palate; two hands for touching. These are the ten princes of which Solomon says in Ecclesiastes:

*Wisdom hath strengthened the wise more than ten princes of the city.* [Eccles 7.20]

Wisdom is the love and contemplation of God, which strengthens the wise man, the soul which relishes the sweetness of love, more than ten princes of the city, that is, more than all the delights of the ten bodily senses. The former truly satisfy, the latter leave us wholly empty. The former leave a swet taste, the latter a bitter. Whoever serves the former is free, but whoever serves the latter is wretched. The man who buys the yoke of oxen makes a bad bargain. He spurns the savour of divine love and subjects himself to the unhappy appetite of the five senses, a wretched slavery.

If only a man would take on the Lord's yoke, which is gentle, and not the harsh yoke of the devil! Isaiah says:

*The yoke of their burden, and the rod of their shoulder, and the sceptre of their oppressor, thou hast overcome, as in the day of Madian*. [Is 9.4]

See how Isaiah is **concordant** with the Gospel. What the Gospel calls a farm, Isaiah calls a rod; and what is termed a yoke of oxen is called the yoke of their burden; and what is called a wife in the one is called a sceptre in the other. The book of Judges tells how Gideon (whose name means ‘turning in the womb’) overcame Madian with three hundred men, and with trumpets and lamps. In the same way the penitent, who should turn around in the womb of contrition, should take ‘three hundred’ (the Trinitarian faith), together with the trumpets of confession and the lamps of satisfaction. With them he should overcome the yoke of the devil’s burden, the pleasures of the five senses with which the devil burdens the soul; and the rod of his shoulder, the desire to dominate with which the devil pricks the soul like a peasant poking his donkey with a stick; and the sceptre of his oppressor, the unruliness of the flesh expressed in a two-fold way, by gluttony and lust. The ruling sceptre is lust, which rules nearly everyone; and the oppressor is gluttony, which daily, under the guise of necessity, exacts the usury of pleasure.

**(A sermon on the infestation of vices and on the mortification of the flesh: Naas the Ammonite came up.)**

9. There is a **concordance** to this in the first book of Kings, where it says that

*Naas the Ammonite came up, and began to fight against Jabes Galaad. And all the men of Jabes said to Naas: Make a covenant with us; and we will serve thee. And Naas answered them: On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may pluck out your right eyes, and make you a reproach to all nations in all the people of Israel*. [1Kg (Sm) 11.1-2]

There follows:

*And the spirit of the Lord came upon Saul, when he had heard these words; and his anger was exceedingly kindled. And taking both the oxen, he cut them in pieces*. [1Kg (Sm) 11.6-7]

‘Naas’ means ‘serpent’, so he is a fit symbol of the devil, who in the form of a serpent deceived our first parents. ‘Ammonite’ means ‘people of grief’, or else ‘crusher, squeezer’. Naas is king of the Ammonites, just as Satan the ancient serpent is prince of the malign spirits who dwell in the grief and sorrow which (according to the Apostle) works death [cf. 2Cor 7.10]. They crush and squeeze the life of the saints. Ecclesiasticus says:

*As a furnace to gold, as a file to iron, and as a flail to wheat:*

*So is tribulation to the just man*. [cf. Prov 27.21,17; Ecclus 27.6]

The wicked man lives for the good, in the sense that his life benefits the good man, smoothing his rough places by his abrasiveness. Naas fights against Jabes Galaad

(‘dried out’ and ‘mound of witness’), the soul that first has to be parched of its vices and then filled with the witness of the Lord’s Passion. Naas fights against the men of Jabes Galaad, to pluck out their right eyes, because he knows that so maimed they will be less able to do battle. The right eye is the clear sight of discretion. The devil tries to pluck it out, leaving the left eye of worldly affection. He knows that the man who does not desire eternal things will love worldly prosperity. If he is held by earthly things, he will yield to the least attack.

He who wants to free his soul from the snares and traps of the devil, must do as it says afterwards: the spirit of the Lord came upon Saul, etc. Saul, the anointed king, was a good man at the start of his reign, when he freed this city. He represents the just man, anointed with the grace of God. When the spirit of the Lord, contrition of heart, comes upon him, he is angered against his past sins, and cuts the two oxen in pieces. The ‘two oxen’ are the two eyes, the two ears, and so on. He cuts the two oxen in pieces, when he wears out his eyes with tears, that have coveted what is not lawful. He cuts the two oxen in pieces, when he puts a thorny fence around his ears, so that they do not listen to detraction or flattery; and so with the rest of the senses. He offers as many sacrifices as he finds stumbling-blocks in himself.

10. *And another said: I have married a wife*, etc. It is not marriage, it is the abuse of marriage that leads many astray and holds them back from the Lord’s supper. They enter upon marriage, not to found a family, but from carnal desire. There are three good reasons for taking a wife. The first is the procreation of children, as Genesis says: *Increase and multiply* [Gen 1.28]. The second is mutual help: *It is not good for man to be alone; let us make him a help like unto himself* [Gen 2.18]. The third is because of incontinence; as the Apostle says*: If someone is not continent, let him marry, only in the Lord* [cf. 1Cor 7.9,39]. If anyone marries for any other reason besides these, woe betide him! Furthermore, although marriage is a good thing in itself, it does bring with it considerable danger. As the Apostle says in I Corinthians: *He that is with a wife is solicitous for the things of the world; how he may please his wife. And he is divided* [1Cor 7.33]. He has a two-fold responsibility, towards God and towards his wife. It is difficult to walk the middle path, to divide one’s attention between each so as not to neglect either. We read in the first book of Kings that:

*The two wives of David were taken captives, and David was greatly afflicted*. [1Kg(Sm) 30,5-6]

If had not had wives, he would undoubtedly not have been so greatly afflicted.

In the Gospel passage the ‘wife’ stands for the lust of the flesh, which is not ‘bought’ but ‘married’. Every sinner, from the moment of his birth, finds himself accompanied by the sins of the flesh. Yet we may ask why the first two asked to be excused, but not the third? The answer is that the pleasure of the flesh so holds a man in thrall that he neither desires to come to eternal joys, nor cares about excusing himself. From this it is clear that he does not love God; who at the prayers of the Old Testament patriarchs lovingly came down to the wedding, to espouse human nature to himself.

The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause of the Gospel:

*In this we have known the charity of God, because he hath laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*. [1Jn 3.16]

St John mentions three things: God, ourselves and our brethren. He who loves God does not buy the farm of domination. He who loves his own soul restrains the yoke of his five senses. He who loves his neighbour, for whom he should lay down his life, will in no wise marry the wife of lust, which would scandalize and offend him.

We ask you, then, Lord Jesus, to take away from us entirely the farm of domination; to restrain the pleasures of our five senses; and to keep us away from the wife of accursed concupiscence; so that we may be free to come to your supper. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A sermon against the lover of the world, who when he is left despised by the world, is taken up by Christ: A young man of Egypt, the servant of a man.)**

11. There follows, thirdly:

*Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant: Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the feeble, and the blind, and the lame.* [Lk 14.21]

When the first three refuse to come to the Lord's supper, the servant is sent to bring in the poor, the weak, the blind and the lame. They rarely fall away, who lack the delights of sin; and those who have nothing in the world to delight in are more quickly converted to grace. Happy the misery, then, that leads to better things! And happy darkness, that brings forth light! Those destitute of worldly abundance, like poor people; or of bodily health, like the sick, the blind and the lame- who lack the pleasures of sin- are all the more readily brought into the Lord's supper.

So there is a **concordance** in the first book of Kings, where it says that

*A young man of Egypt, the servant of an Amalecite, despised and abandoned by his master because he began to be sick... David found and fed, and made the guide for his journey*. [cf. 1Kg(Sm) 30.11-15]

The Egyptian boy represents the lover of this world, covered with the darkness of sin. When he cannot keep up with the world in its worldly pursuits, he is despised by it and left sick. Christ finds him, because he himself converts to his love those whom the world

despises and abandons, and he feeds them with the food of God's word, and makes them a guide for his journey when, from time to time, he makes such a one his preacher.

The four kinds of person are not distinguished without reason: the poor, the feeble, the blind and the lame. The poor controls little and possesses little. The 'feeble' literally refers to one suffering a disorder of the liver, which weakens the body, though here it has a more general sense of weakness. The blind man lacks sight in both his eyes, and the lame man has difficulty in walking. These four physical disabilities represent four groups of people, ensnared by four vices: avarice, wrath, lust and pride. The avaricious man is 'poor', because he controls money, but not himself: he is possessed, rather than possessing. Even when he has much, he regards it as inadequate. The Philosopher[2] says: "Though a man be master of the whole world, he is wretched if what he has does not seem enough;" and: 'I do not reckon poor the man who is satisfied with what he has, however little it may be.' The feeble man is the angry, 'liverish', man. >From bitterness he burns with wrath, and in this state is unable to work God's justice. Job says: *Anger killeth the foolish* [Job 5.2]. The blind man is the lustful man, lacking the sight of grace in either eye, reason and understanding. The lame man is the proud man, unable to go sure-footed by the way of humility. Of these and like vices the Philosopher[3] says: "Shun in every way, destroy with fire and sword, and separate by every artifice: laziness from the body, ignorance from the mind, lust from the belly, sedition from the state and discord from men." These four sinners, held in the streets and lanes of carnal pleasure and worldly vanity, the merciful Lord calls to the heavenly banquet by means of the preacher of Holy Church.

The third thing he says to the servant is:

*Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.* [Lk 14.23]

Those compelled to come in represent those who, scourged by adversity, are forced to come to the Lord's supper. Hosea says:

*Behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns and I will stop it up with a wall: and she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers and shall not overtake them: and she shall seek them and shall not find. And she shall say: I will go and return to my first husband, because it was better with me then, than now*. [Hos 2.6-7]

The Lord closes up the ways of the sinful soul, her crooked deeds whereby she follows her demon lovers, with the hedge of adversity and the wall of sickness; so that she will return to himself, her first husband. Once she has experienced the sweetness of God's love, and is filled with joy in contemplating him, she says that she is far, far better off than when she was abused by the pleasures of her wretched flesh.

12. The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** with this third clause of the Gospel, which refers to the poor:

*He that hath the substance of this world, and shall see his brother in need, and shall shut up his bowels from him: how doth the charity of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed, and in truth*. [1Jn 3.17-18]

The Lord says in Luke:

*Yet that which remaineth, give alms; and behold, all things are clean to you*. [Lk 11.41]

The Gloss says: "Give to the poor what is left over after meeting the need for food and clothing." He who has the substance of this world, and has set aside what he needs for food and clothing, and sees his brother in need, for whom Christ died: he should give him what remains. If he does not give, if he shuts his heart against his poor brother, I maintain that he commits mortal sin; for God's love is not in him. If it were in him, he would gladly give to his poor brother. Woe to those who have cellars full of wine and corn, and two or three changes of clothing, and have the poor of Christ, hungry and naked, crying at their doors. Even when they give something, it is only a little, and of the worst rather than the best quality. The time will come, it will surely come, when they themselves will be standing outside the door and crying: Lord, Lord, open to us! And they who would not listen before will hear these words: *Amen, amen, I say to you, I know you not. Depart, ye cursed, into eternal fire* [Mt 25. 11-12,41]. Solomon says:

*He that stoppeth his ear against the cry of the poor shall also cry himself and shall not be heard*. [Prov 21.13]

Let us then, dearest brothers, ask our Lord Jesus Christ, who has called us by his preaching, to graciously call us by the inspiration of his grace to the supper of heavenly glory; where we shall be satisfied as we contemplate how sweet the Lord is. May God, One and Three, make us sharers of this sweetness. He is blessed, to be praised, and glorious throughout eternal ages. May every faithful soul who is brought into this supper say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] BERNARD, *De consideratione*, III,1,2; PL 182.759

[2] SENECA, *Epistola* 9; *Epistola* 1

[3] The source of this saying is unknown.

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the third Sunday after Pentecost: *The publicans drew near unto Jesus*; which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for the preacher or prelate of the Church, who should build the wall of the Church and kill the lion in the pit: *Banaias the son of Joiada*.)**

1. At that time: *The publicans and sinners drew near unto Jesus to hear him*, etc. [Lk.15.1]

It says in the second book of Kings that

*Banaias the son of Joiada went down and slew a lion in the midst of a pit, in the time of snow*. [2Kg(Sm) 23.20]

Banaias means ‘the Lord’s mason’, and he represents the preacher who, with the mortar of the divine word, joins together the living stones, the faithful of the Church, in the unity of the Spirit. Of this mason, the Lord says to Amos:

*What seest thou, Amos? And I said: A mason’s trowel. And the Lord said: Behold, I will lay down the trowel in the midst of my people*. [Am 7.8]

A trowel is a flat piece of iron, with which the walls are cemented, fixing the stones together with chalk or clay. This trowel is preaching, which the Lord lays down in the midst of the Christian people, so that it may be common to all; and so that it may spread itself widely over just and sinner alike, joining together those who believe in Christ with the cement of charity. The mason is ‘son of Joiada’, a name that means ‘one who knows or understands’.

The preacher must be a son of knowledge and learning. He must first know what, to whom, and when to preach; and then he must know in himself how to live in accordance with what he preaches. Balaam lacked this knowledge. He said of himself, in the book of Numbers:

*The man whose eye is stopped up hath said: The hearer of the words of God hath said, who knoweth the doctrine of the Highest, and seeth the visions of the Almighty, who falling hath his eyes opened*. [Num 24.15-16]

This is how, in the perverse preacher, the eye of reason is stopped up. Even though by his knowledge he sees the doctrine of the Highest, and the visions of the Almighty, he does not know them by experience. He falls, lacking insight, even though his eyes are open in terms of knowledge. But Banaias the son of Joiada went down from the contemplation of God in order to instruct his neighbour and kill the lion (the devil, or mortal sin) which is in the pit, the frozen soul of the sinner. He does this 'in the time of snow', when the cold of malice and wickedness freezes the minds of sinners, those who in today's Gospel are spoken of as drawing near to Jesus.

2. There are three things to note in this Gospel. First, the sinners drawing near to Jesus, while the Pharisees murmured. Second, the finding of the lost sheep. Third, the recovery of the lost coin. Note also that on this Sunday and next, we shall **concord** with the clauses of the Gospel some stories from the second book of Kings.

In the Introit of the Mass we sing: *Look upon me and have mercy, O Lord*. The Epistle of St Peter is read: *Be you humbled under the mighty hand of God*; which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the three clauses of the Gospel. The first part is: *Be you humbled*. The second is: *Be sober*. The third is: *But the God of all grace*.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on converted sinners: *There gathered unto David*; and on the nature of bees**.)

3. Let us say, then:

*The publicans and sinners drew near unto Jesus to hear him. And the pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying: This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them*. [Lk 15.1-2]

Regarding this, it says in the first book of Kings that:

*All that were in distress and oppressed with debt, and under affliction of mind, gathered themselves unto David. And he became their prince*. [1Kg(Sm) 22.2]

Note these three: in distress, oppressed with debt, under affliction of mind. David is Christ, to whom sinners must draw near when they are in distress from the devil's temptation or from carnal desire; or when they are oppressed by the debt of mortal sin they owe to the devil. When they are afflicted in mind, having bitter sorrow for their sins, Christ himself will be their prince. A prince is one who takes first place. Christ forestalls the devil in regard to the death of sinners, rescuing their souls and bearing them away to

heaven. It is right, then, that publicans and sinners drew near unto Jesus . etc.

Note these four: ‘drew near’, ‘to hear’, ‘receiveth’, ‘eateth’. These refer, respectively, to contrition of heart, to full and entire confession and satisfaction, to the reconciliation of the sinner with the divine mercy, and to the refreshment of eternal glory. Someone draws near to Jesus when he is sorry for his sins; as Genesis says:

*Then Juda coming nearer said boldly: I beseech thee, my lord, let thy servant speak a word in thy ears, and be not angry with thy servant*. [Gen 44.18]

Juda (‘confessing’) stands for the penitent who draws near in contrition of heart, and trusting in the mercy of God confidently makes his confession into the ears of his confessor. He hears Jesus, when he tries in every way to make amends. Job says:

*With the hearing of the ear I have heard thee: but now my eye seeth thee.*

*Therefore I reprehend myself, and do penance in dust and ashes*. [Job 42.5-6]

Jesus receives sinners when he pours upon them the grace of reconciliation. Luke says:

*His father running to him fell upon his son’s neck and kissed him*. [Lk 15.20]

The father’s kiss signifies the grace of divine reconciliation. Again, Jesus eats with penitents, and he will satisfy them with his glory in rest and riches.

4. There is a **concordance** to these four in the second book of Kings:

*Then came all the tribes of Israel to David in Hebron, saying: Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh*. [2Kg(Sm) 5.1]

‘Tribe’ suggests ‘tribute’, or it may derive from the fact that Romulus originally made a three-fold division of the people into senators, soldiers and common people. ‘All the tribes of Israel’ represent the gathering of all penitents, who every day offer the Lord their tribute of duty and service. They are divided into three classes: the ‘senators’ are the contemplatives; the ‘soldiers’ are the preachers; and the ‘common people’ are those who are active in the world. All these should turn with one mind to David, Jesus Christ, in Hebron (which means, ‘my marriage’); that is to say, in contrition of heart wherein the grace of the Holy Spirit is joined to the soul that is sorry for sin, as bridegroom to bride. From this marriage is born the heir of eternal life.

*Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh*, they say. That is how penitents should speak to Christ: "Have mercy on us, forgive our sins, for we are your flesh and bone. It was for us men that you became man, to redeem us. You learned to be merciful by the things which you suffered [cf. Heb 5.8]. We cannot say to an angel, *Behold, we are thy bone and thy*

*flesh*; only to you, O God, O Son of God, who took not hold of angels, but of the seed of Abraham [Heb 2.16], can we say, *Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh*. Have mercy, then, upon your bone and your flesh. Whoever hated his own flesh? [Eph 5.29]. You are our brother and our flesh [Gen 37.27], and so you are bound to have pity, and feel for the miseries of your brothers. You and we have the same Father, you by nature and we by grace. You who are powerful in our Father's house, do not deprive us of that holy heritage, because we are thy bone and thy flesh. The children of Israel carried Joseph's bones from Egypt into the land of promise [cf. Jos 24.32], so do you carry us, your bones, from this Egyptian shadowland into the land of blessedness, for we are thy bone and thy flesh." Good words, then: *The publicans and sinners drew near unto Jesus*.

Penitents must behave like the bees. Natural History[1] says that when their king flies out of the hive, the other bees accompany him with a great retinue, he in the middle and they all around. When their king cannot fly, the swarm of bees carries him; and when he dies, they die too. Jesus Christ our king flew from the hive, the Father's side. Like good bees, we should follow him, and fly with him, and set him in our midst; that is, we should have his faith in our hearts, and we should reinforce it with a great retinue of virtues. If, in any of his members, he falls into sin, we should raise him up again by prayer and preaching. We should die with him who died upon the cross, crucifying our flesh with its vices and concupiscences [cf. Gal 5.24]. It says rightly that the publicans and sinners drew near to Jesus.

**(A sermon on the Annunciation of holy Mary: *King David arose and sat in the gate*.)**

5. There follows: *To hear him*. There is a **concordance** to this in the second book of Kings, where it says that:

*King David arose and sat in the gate: and it was told to all the people that the king sat in the gate. And all the people came before the king*. [2Kg(Sm) 19.8]

Jesus Christ, the King of kings, our David, 'arose' when he went out from the Father's side, and 'sat in the gate' when he humbled himself in the blessed Virgin Mary. Of her Ezekiel says:

*This gate shall be shut. It shall not be opened and no one shall pass through it: because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered in by it; and it shall be shut for the prince. The prince himself shall sit in it, to eat bread before the Lord*. [Ezek 44.2-3]

Note that it is shut for the prince; and the prince shall sit in it. She was closed to the prince of this world, the devil, because her mind was not open to any temptation of his; and only Christ the prince sat in her, by his humility in taking her flesh, so as to eat bread before the Lord, that is, to do the Lord's will: My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, he said [Jn 4.34]. And it was told to all the people by the apostles that the king sat in the gate, that is, that he had taken flesh of blessed Mary. And so the whole multitude of penitents and faithful comes before the king, ready to obey his commands in and

through everything.

**(On the reconciliation of the sinner with God: *Absalom was called for; and he went in to the king*.)**

6. There follows: *And the pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying*, etc. They make two mistakes. They think themselves just, although they are proud; and they think others guilty, although they are already penitent. *This man receiveth sinners*. There is a **concordance** to this in the second book of Kings, where it says:

*And Absalom was called for; and he went in to the king, and prostrated himself on the ground before him: and the king kissed Absalom*. [2Kg(Sm) 14.33]

Absalom ('the father's peace') stands in this passage for the penitent, who by penitence makes peace with God the Father, whom he has offended by sinning. Called by contrition of heart, he goes in to the king by confession, and prostrates himself on the ground before him by satisfaction, afflicting his mortal clay and reckoning himself vile and unworthy. He does this before the king, not before men; and so the king receives the penitent as his son, by the kiss of reconciliation.

The converted sinner speaks of this reception in the Introit of today's Mass:

*Look thou upon me, O Lord, and have mercy on me: for I am alone and poor.*

*See my abjection and labour: and forgive me all my sins, O my God*. [Ps 24.16,18]

Look upon me with the merciful eye that looked on Peter; and have mercy on my by forgiving my sins. I am alone, and you are my one and only friend. I am poor and empty, that you may fill my emptiness. See my abjection in my confession, and my labour in satisfaction; and forgive all my sins, my God.

**(On the same: *Mephiboseth ate at David's table*.)**

7. There follows: *And eateth with them*. There is a **concordance** to this in the second book of Kings, where it says that:

*Mephiboseth ate at David's table, as one of the sons of the king... and he dwelt in Jerusalem, because he ate always of the king's table*. [2Kg(Sm) 9.11,13]

Mephiboseth means 'man of shame', and he here represents the penitent, who is ashamed of his sins. His shame brings him glory, since he will dwell in the heavenly Jerusalem and eat at the king's table, as one of the holy apostles to whom the Lord says in the Gospel:

*I dispose to you, as my Father hath disposed to me, a kingdom: that you may eat and drink at my table, in the kingdom of heaven*. [Lk 22.29-30]

The first part of today's Epistle is **concordant** to this clause of the holy Gospel, wherein Peter speaks to converted sinners:

*Be you humbled under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in the time of visitation; casting all your care on him, for he hath care for you*. [1Pt 5.6-7]

Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, who puts down the mighty and exalts the humble [cf. Lk 1.52], so that he may exalt you to that heavenly table in the time of his visitation, that is, of death or of the final judgement. Cast all your care on him, because he cares more about your salvation than you do yourself: *he made us, and not we ourselves* [Ps 99.3].

Let us ask, then, dearest brothers, our Lord Jesus Christ to make us sinners draw near to him and hear him; graciously to receive us, and feed us with him at the table of eternal life. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on baptismal innocence: *What man of you*.)**

8. There follows, secondly:

*And he spoke to them this parable, saying: What man of you that hath a hundred sheep, and if he shall lose one of them, doth he not leave the ninety-nine in the desert, and go after that which was lost, until he find it?* etc. [Lk 15.3-4]

In the two parables of this Gospel, our Lord Jesus Christ taught the sinners who drew near him how what was lost might be restored, how what was restored might be kept safe, and how they might do penance for what they had done. We must now see what is the moral significance of the man, and the lost sheep carried upon the shoulders.

The man represents any penitent who walks according to the new man, and who considers himself as dust. He has a hundred sheep, a hundred being the number of perfection. The hundred sheep stand for the gifts of grace and nature which perfect a man, to the measure of perfection this life allows. The gifts of grace and nature may well be called 'sheep', because just as sheep are simple, innocent and quiet animals, so the gifts of grace and nature make a man simple and straightforward towards his neighbour, innocent as regards himself, and quiet before God.

*If he shall lose one of them, doth he not leave*, etc. The lost sheep stands for a man's first innocence, which was conferred in Baptism. This innocence is represented by the

two things given to the baptized by the priest, the white robe and the lighted candle. The white robe stands for innocence, the light for the example of a good life. In these two, every man's innocence consists; this is the simple, harmless sheep. A man loses this sheep when he soils his baptismal robe and blows out the light of his candle. A man should grieve greatly, then, when he loses this sheep.

**(On grief and sorrow for its loss and restoration: *David made this lamentation*.)**

9. There is a **concordance** to the loss of this sheep, and the sorrow for its loss, in the second book of Kings:

*David made this kind of lamentation over Saul, and over Jonathan, his son:*

*Ye mountains of Gelboe, let neither dew, nor rain come upon you:*

*neither be they fields of first-fruits.*

*For there was cast away the shield of the valiant, the shield of Saul,*

*as though he had not been anointed with oil.* [2Kg(Sm) 1.17,21]

Like the man, David stands for the penitent, who should weep for Saul and Jonathan, for the little lost sheep, for first innocence lost. Saul means 'anointed', and he represents baptismal innocence, given with the anointing with chrism. Jonathan means 'gift of the dove', and he stands for the grace of the Holy Spirit, conferred in Baptism. Because the man has lost these two, he should make this kind of lamentation: *Ye mountains of Gelboe*, etc. Gelboe means 'fall, or flood, of rain', and it represents pride, which 'falls' because 'pride has a fall'; and the flood of riches which heap up like stones in God's orchard. No dew, no rain, no first-fruits are found on these mountains. Dew, rain and first-fruits stand for contrition, confession and satisfaction.

**(A sermon on contrition: *If there be dew on the fleece only*.)**

The dew of contrition is referred to in the book of Judges, where Gideon says:

*If there be dew on the fleece only, and it be dry on all the ground beside, I shall know that by my hand thou wilt deliver Israel. And it was so. And rising before day, wringing the fleece, he filled a vessel with the dew*. [Jg 6.37-38]

It is a sign of Israel's deliverance (our soul's), if the dew (the grace of compunction) is on the fleece (our heart); while on the ground beside (our body) there is a drying up of vices. We should rise up in the night of this our exile, spirit and body together, to do works of penance. We should wring out the fleece of our heart with love of glory and fear of hell, as with two hands, and fill the bowl of our eyes with the water of compunction,

springing up to eternal life [cf. Jn 4.14].

**(On confession: *I will give you rain*.)**

The Lord speaks of the rain of confession in Leviticus:

*I will give you rain in due seasons, and the ground shall bring forth its increase: and the trees shall be filled with fruit. The threshing of your harvest shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time; and you shall eat your bread to the full*. [Lev 26.3-5]

When the Lord gives the penitent rain, that is, a full confession, he will bring for an increase that is his own, not another's. This increase is the beginning of good works, which he brings forth by the rain of confession. And the trees shall be filled with fruit. Strong and fruitful, the trees are the minds of penitents, strong with the firm intention of not falling again. They are fertile and full of virtues. The threshing of you harvest, when you afflict your flesh, shall reach unto the vintage, heartfelt joy, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time, eternal life, in which we shall eat bread to the full, according to the words: *I shall be satisfied when thy glory shall appear* [Ps 16.15]. See how much good confession does!

**(On satisfaction: *Abraham planted a grove*.)**

Regarding the field of satisfaction, Genesis says:

*Abraham planted a grove in Bersabee, and there called upon the name of the Lord God eternal. And he was a sojourner in the land of the Philistines many days*. [Gen 21.33-34]

Note these three things: he planted, he called, he sojourned. Abraham is the just man, who plants in his mind (Bersabee, 'well of fullness') the mysterious grove of charity, whereby we love God and our neighbour. The just man's mind is called a 'well' on account of its humility, and 'of fullness' because of the sweetness of contemplation. And there he called upon the name of the Lord God eternal. The name of the eternal God is Jesus, which means 'Saviour'. The just man calls on the name of the Saviour, that he may bestow salvation and keep it for ever. And he was a sojourner in the land of the Philistines. 'Philistines', as has often been said, means 'falling from drink'. They stand for the five senses of the body which, when drunk with worldly vanity, fall into sin. The land of these Philistines is the body, which is ruled by the five senses. The just man must be a sojourner in this land, tilling it with vigils and fastings, with sorrow and labour, so that it produces the first-fruits.

So these words are apt: *Ye mountains of Gelboe, let neither dew, nor rain come upon you:*

*neither be they fields of first-fruits*. Upon the heights of pride, and in the abundance of temporal things, there is not found the dew of compunction, nor the rain of confession, nor the fields of first-fruits of satisfaction. Rather, there is cast away the shield of the mighty, the shield of Saul.

The shield is faith, as the Apostle says:

*Taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one*.[Eph 6.16]

Faith casts away temporal things, because it utterly perishes in their abundance. Just men are always able to fight bravely with this shield; as it says in the book of Josue, where the Lord says to Josue:

*Lift up the shield that is in thy hand towards the city of Hai, for I will deliver it to thee. And when he had lifted up his shield towards the city, the ambush that lay hid rose up immediately, and going to the city, took it and set it on fire*. [Jos 8.18-19]

The shield in the hand is faith shown in deeds, and when we lift it up from earthly things, ‘Hai’ (‘heap of stones’, the abundance of temporal things) is taken and set on fire. It is taken, so as to be scattered to the poor; it is set on fire, when in fervour of spirit it is reckoned as dust and ashes. A man lifts up the shield in his hand against Hai, when he reinforces faith with deeds, whereby he destroys the pride and wealth of the world by despising them.

So it is well said: *For there was cast away the shield of the valiant, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil*. The proud and the avaricious cast away the faith of Jesus Christ and the grace of Baptism, with which they have been anointed, onto the rubbish-tip of riches, as they seek those temporal things. It is well said: *Doth he not leave the ninety-nine in the desert, and go after that which was lost, until he find it?* He should leave everything, put away everything, weep over the mountains of Gelboe, lament the pride and wealth of temporal things, wherein he has lost his little sheep, stripped himself of the robe of innocence, put out the candle of good example; and he should persevere in tears, vigils and fasting until he find it.

**(A sermon on the penitent: *Issachar shall be a strong ass*.)**

10. *And when he hath found it, [doth he not] lay it upon his shoulders, rejoicing, and coming home, call together his friends and neighbours, saying to them: Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost?* [Lk 15.5-6]

Shoulders represent the labour of penance; as Genesis says:

*Issachar shall be a strong ass lying down in the borders. He saw rest that it was good:*

*and the land that it was excellent. And he bowed his shoulder to carry*. [Gen 49.14-15]

Issachar means ‘reward’, the penitent who labours only for the wage of an eternal reward. He is called ‘a strong ass’, who bears great troubles for Christ, ‘lying down in the borders’. The two borders are the beginning and end of life, and the penitent lives between them as he attentively considers his beginning and his end. Carnal folk live not ‘in the borders’, but ‘between the borders’, of which Debora says in the book of Judges: *Why dwellest thou between two borders, that thou mayest hear the bleatings of the flocks?* [Jg 5.16]. He dwells ‘between the borders’ when he pays no attention to his unhappy beginning or his wretched end, but is a slave to the pleasures of his own body. In this way he ‘hears the bleatings of the flock’, the subtle and sweet persuasion of the five senses. Sensuality seems to have the voice of the flock, though its suggestions are more like the hissing of serpents, pretending to the innocence of the flock, though they conceal the cunning of a wolf; and they inject the serpent’s poison into the soul.

This Issachar sees, with the eye of faith and with the insight of contemplation, the rest of eternal blessedness that it is good, and the land of eternal fulfilment that it is excellent. And so, rejoicing, he bows his shoulder to carry the little sheep that he had lost. And coming home, to his own conscience, he calls together his friends and neighbours, the rational affections that are his true friends and neighbours, and rejoices with them, saying: *Rejoice with me*, etc. When innocence is re-established, grace is restored. No wonder there is joy between a man and his conscience, when there is joy among God and the angels of heaven!

**(On the joy of God and the angels over the converted sinner: I say to you that there is joy**.)

11. *I say to you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who do not need penance*. [Lk 15.7]

I, the Word of the Father, say to you that there is joy in heaven over one sinner doing penance and recovering his innocence. In the same Gospel the Lord says of this joy:

*Bring forth quickly the first robe and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet... It is fit that we should feast and make merry, because this my son was dead and is come to life again, was lost and is found*. [Lk 15.22,24]

The ‘first robe’ is baptismal innocence, the ‘ring’ is a well-formed faith, the signet which enlightens the soul; the ‘shoes’ are mortification of the flesh, abhorrence of sin and contempt of the world. These are given to the penitent son, over whose repentance there is more joy in heaven than over ninety-nine just. This means luke-warm souls who think they are just; hence Ecclesiastes says: *Be not over just* [Eccles 7.17].

The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause:

*Be sober and watch in prayer, because your adversary*, etc. [1Pt 5.8]

First he says, *Be sober*, and then, *Watch*. Be sober, without drunkenness, because if you are under its influence you cannot keep watch. Soberness and watchfulness are necessary, because our adversary the devil is like a lion going about looking for the little sheep, to eat it. We must resist him in the faith we have received in Baptism; and we must keep our innocence, so as to come with the truly penitent to the joy of the angels.

May he grant this, who rescued that lost sheep Adam, with all his posterity, from the maw of that wolf the devil. He carried it home, rejoicing, on his own shoulders which were fastened to the cross, home to eternal bliss. Even the angels rejoiced over this recovery. They rejoice that man is reconciled with them. May that set us on fire for uprightness, so that we may do what pleases them, whose patronage we should desire and whom we should fear to offend. May he bring us to their fellowship, he to whom be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the penitent soul, her confession and mortification of the flesh: *When the woman of Thecua was come in to the king*.)**

12. There follows, thirdly:

*Or what woman having ten groats, if she lose one groat, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house and seek diligently until she find it?* etc. [Lk 15.8]

A moral interpretation. This woman represents the soul, regarding which there is a **concordance** in the second book of Kings:

*When the woman of Thecua was come in to the king, she fell before him upon the ground, and worshipped, and said: Save me, O king. And the king said to her: What is the matter with thee? She answered: Alas, I am a widow woman; for my husband is dead. And thy handmaid had two sons: and they quarrelled with each other in the field, and there was none to part them. And the one struck the other, and slew him. And behold, the whole kindred rising against thy handmaid saith: Deliver him that hath slain his brother, that we may kill him for the life of his brother, whom he slew, and that we may destroy the heir. And they seek to quench my spark that is left*. [2Kg(Sm) 14.4-7]

Let us see what is meant by the king, the woman of Thecua and her husband, the two sons and their quarrel, the death of the one, the kindred and the spark. The king is Christ, the woman of Thecua is the soul, her dead husband is the world. The two sons are reason and sensuality, and the quarrel is the disharmony between them. The death of the one is the mortification of the carnal appetite, the kindred are the basic instincts, and the spark is the light of reason.

So: *When the woman of Thecua was come in to the king, she fell before him*, etc. Thecua means 'trumpet'. The Thecuite woman is the penitent soul, whose trumpet of confession sounds sweetly in her Creator's ear. Note that in the Old Testament the trumpet sounds for three things: for battle, for banquets and for festivals [cf. Num 10.8-10]. The trumpet of confession summons us to do battle against the demons, for when the devil is despised in confession, he rises in rage. It calls us to the banquet of penance, and to the festival of glory.

Note these three: she went in to the king, she fell before him, and she worshipped. The king is Christ, who *rules the nations with a rod of iron* [Ps 2.9], with inflexible justice. To him, the soul goes in by hope, falls before him by humility, and worships him by faith. She says, *Save me, O king. Alas, I am a widow woman*, etc. Note these three: Alas, woman, and widow. She says, 'Alas!' because she is sorry for sin; 'woman', because she is weak and frail; 'widow', because she is bereft of all human help; so she says, Save me, O king, sorrowful, frail and destitute. Save me, because I am your servant. Save me, because my husband is dead. The husband of the penitent soul was the world, which now was dead to her, as she was dead to the world. As the Apostle says: *The world is dead to me, and I to the world* [Gal 6.14].

There follows: *And thy handmaid had two sons: and they quarrelled*, etc. The two sons of the soul are its two parts, higher and lower, reason and sensuality, between which there is the greatest quarrel, since the spirit lusteth after the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit [Gal 5.17]. Regarding this quarrel, Moses says in Genesis:

*There arose a strife between the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot. Abraham therefore said to Lot: Let there be no quarrel, I beseech thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen: for we are brethren. Behold, the whole land is before thee: depart from me I pray thee. If thou wilt go to the left hand, I will take the right: if thou choose the right hand, I will pass to the left.* [Gen 13.7-9]

Abraham represents reason, and Lot sensuality. The herdsmen of the flocks are the affections and movements of each, between which there is daily strife. But Abraham said, *Let there be no quarrel, I beseech thee, between me and thee*. Thus does reason chastise sensuality, wanting to pacify it. It says, we are brethren, do not fight against me, do not pick a quarrel. *Behold, the whole land is before thee*, that you may live according to your need, not for the sake of pleasure. Use what is lawful; live discreetly, because the Lord has *given the earth to the children of men* [Ps 113.16], not to the offspring of beasts. But because I see that your imagination and thought are prone to evil from your youth [cf. Gen 8.21], therefore I pray you to depart from me, because two opposites cannot live together. *What fellowship hath light with darkness? What part hath the faithful with the unbeliever?* [2Cor 6.14,15]. Depart from me, then, I pray; because if you do not depart, I am afraid your company will shape my behaviour. "One grape can develop mould at the sight of another"; and, "A bad companion will pass on his scabs and sores to his innocent and simple friend," says the Philosopher[2]. Depart from me, then, I pray*: If thou wilt go to the left hand*, etc. Note that what is left to the flesh is right to the spirit, and

what is right to the spirit is left to the flesh. This was signified in the disposition of Christ's body on the cross. His right hand was towards the north, and his left towards the south, implying opposition. What we reckon on the left, was on the right to him; and temporal prosperity, signified by the south, and on the right for us, was on the left to him. So the words are apt: *And thy handmaid had two sons: and they quarrelled with each other in the field, and there was none to part them*.

There follows: *And the one struck the other, and slew him*. If he had departed from his brother, he would not have been killed. In this way, the just man who uses his reason should reprehend and kill the carnal appetite. There is a **concordance** to this in the second book of Kings, where it says that David,

*calling one of his servants, said: Go near and fall upon him. And he struck him so that he died. And David said to him: Thy blood be upon thy own head. For thy own mouth hath spoken against thee, saying: I have slain the Lord's anointed*. [2Kg(Sm) 1.15-16]

David is the just man, and the just man's servants are the pure affections of reason, by whose unity he should kill the carnal appetite which, a little earlier, had slain the Lord's anointed: that is, the soul anointed with the blood of Jesus Christ.

There follows: *And behold, the whole kindred rising*, etc. The depraved and perverse kindred are the basic instincts which are joined by kinship of blood with the sensuality of the flesh. When they see their kinsman, carnal appetite, being mortified by reason with discreet severity, they rise up daily all together, wanting to avenge the injury to their kinsman, and put out the spark of reason. So the Thecuite woman cries to the king: *Save me, O king, because they seek to quench my spark that is left*. A spark is subtle, agile and burning. The spark is the reason, subtle in discernment, agile in forestalling the devil's temptations, and setting the mind afire with divine love. The basic instincts, that stupid and foolish kindred, try to put out that spark with the water of carnal concupiscence. She says, *that is left*, because after all vices have been committed, there is always a spark of reason left to the soul, to sting it and reproach it for its sins.

**(On the drachma and its parts, and what they mean: *If she shall lose one groat*.)**

13. Let us say, then, of this woman: *Or what woman having ten groats*. The 'groat' is the drachma, which according to the Gloss was a coin of a certain value, having the king's image on it. Now a 'drachma' is a quarter of a stater; whereas 'drama', without the 'ch', is a kind of song, as in the anthem which speaks of "sweet songs of drama."[3] Alternatively, a 'drachma' is an eighth of an ounce. The 'ounce' is so called because 'at once' it embraces all coins. It consists of eight drachmas, or twenty-four scruples. This is held to be a lawful weight, because the number of scruples equals the number of hours in a day and a night. The scruple weighs six beans, that is to say, six bean-seeds. The bean holds four grains of barley; that is to say, each bean seed weighs the same as four grains of barley.

The 'ounce' stands for Jesus Christ, who, being one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, embraces the universe of all created things in his unity. All creatures are, as it were, the centre of a sphere, while he is the circumference which encloses and encircles all things. So Ecclesiasticus says:

*I alone have compassed the circuit of heaven*. [Ecclus 24.8]

The drachma, the eighth part of an ounce, stands for blessed Mary, who already possesses, and to a far greater extent, both in body and in soul, that bliss which all the saints are to have in the Octave of the resurrection. The twenty-four scruples are the twelve apostles, of whom the Lord said: *Are there not twelve hours of the day?* [Jn 11.9]. The 'day' is Christ; the 'twelve hours' are the twelve apostles, who, on account of their perfection and their strengthening by the Holy Spirit, are given a double number. Like scruples, the least of all coins, they were despised in the world; and they do not cease from guarding the Church, which they founded with their blood, day and night, as if for twenty-four hours. The six beans represent all the martyrs and holy confessors, on account of the perfection of their good works (which we so signify not because of the beans, but of the number six, which is a perfect number). The four grains of barley, the food of cattle, stand for all the faithful of the Church, who like animals are fed with the teaching of the four Evangelists. See how exact is the order: The ounce contains drachmas and scruples; the scruples contain beans, and the beans contain grains of barley. So from Christ are descended blessed Mary and the apostles; from the apostles, the martyrs and confessors, and from them all the faithful of the Church.

This word 'drachma' has chanced to lead us a little away from our point; so let us return to the matter in hand (from which we have not really digressed).

**(A sermon on how the devil kills in us charity towards God and neighbour: *Joab the son of Sarvia*.)**

14. *Or what woman having ten groats?* The ten groats stand for the ten precepts of the Law, which the woman (the soul) has received from the Lord to keep; and if she had kept them, they would indeed remain. Whence the Lord answered the man who asked what he should do to obtain eternal life: *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments* [Mt 19.17]. Keeping the commandments is the way in to eternal life; but since *charity has grown cold and iniquity has abounded* [cf. Mt 24.12], there follows: *if she lose one groat*. She loses the groat by losing charity, in which is the image of the supreme king, and without which no one can attain the octave-day of bliss.

As to how this groat may be lost, there is a **concordance** in the second book of Kings, where it tells how Abner the son of Sarvia killed two chiefs of the army of Israel, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Gether. This is how he killed Abner:

*Joab took him aside to the middle of the gate, to speak to him treacherously. And he stabbed him there in the groin, and he died... And when David heard of it... he said: Let*

*there not fail from the house of Joab one that hath an issue of seed, or that is a leper, or that holdeth the distaff, or that falleth by the sword, or that wanteth bread*. [2Kg(Sm) 3.27-29]

And this is how he killed Amasa:

*Joab had on a close coat of equal length with his habit; and over it was girded with a sword hanging down to his flank, in a scabbard, made in such a manner as to come out with the least motion and strike. And Joab said to Amasa: God save thee, my brother. And he took Amasa by the chin with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not take notice of the sword, which Joab had: and he struck him in the side, and gave him not a second wound*.[2Kg(Sm) 20.8-10]

These two chiefs, Abner and Amasa, stand for the two precepts of charity, towards God and towards our neighbour. Abner ('lamp of the father') stands for the love of God, by which we who sit in darkness are illuminated. Amasa ('lifting up the people') stand for love of neighbour, which lifts him up in his need. Joab (meaning 'enemy', the devil our adversary) kills in us these two precepts, like this: first the love of God, then the love of neighbour.

*Joab took Abner aside to the middle of the gate*, etc. Note these three: the middle of the gate, treacherously, in the groin. The devil, to kill the love of God in us, first takes us to the middle of the gate. The gate is the entrance and exit of our life, and its middle is the vanity of the world. The devil leads us not to the gate, but to the middle, because he blinds the sinner from considering the wretched beginning and end of his life, as he attends to false vanity. Here, speaking deceitfully to him by promising him temporal things, he strikes him in the groin, in the pleasure of the flesh; and so the soul dies and the love of God is lost.

Then he killed Amasa: *Joab had on a close coat*, etc. The devil's close coat is all perverse folk with whom he clothes himself, binding them to him in equal measure to his garment, as he tries to make their malice equal to his own. The sword in the scabbard is the devil's suggestion in the mind of the wicked. And because the devil is accustomed to kill love of neighbour by flattery and lies, there follows: *Joab said to Amasa: God save thee, my brother. And he took him with his right hand*, etc. The Gloss says, "To take the chin in the right hand is as it were to speak soft and fair; but to put the left hand on his sword is to strike secretly, from malice." Ecclesiasticus says:

*An enemy speaketh sweetly with his lips:*

*but in his heart he lieth in wait to throw thee into a pit*. [Ecclus 12.15]

To fall into a pit is the same as to lose the groat of charity; and it was this loss that prompted the curse: *Let there not fail from the house of Joab one that hath an issue of seed*, etc.

Note these five: the issue of seed, leprosy, holding the distaff, falling by the sword, and wanting bread. The devil's household are all those wicked folk who have no love for God or neighbour. They always suffer an issue of seed, a flood of various desires and lust. They become lepers, disfigured by all kinds of error; they hold the distaff, an abundance of temporal things, and then they fall into hell, struck by the sword of divine vengeance, where they will be tortured eternally with hunger and thirst. That is how the coin of charity is lost; but let us see how it is found again.

**(On the four things that are in a lamp, and their meaning: *Doth she not light*.)**

15. There follows: *Doth she not light a lamp?* A lamp has four parts: the earthenware bowl, the coarse linen wick, the soothing oil and the fire that gives light. The earthenware is a reminder of our frailty, the rough wick is penitence, the oil is pity for our neighbour and the fire is the love of God. Blessed is that soul which prepares such a lamp for herself, to find the lost coin. With such a lamp she may turn out the corners of her conscience and diligently seek the lost coin of charity until she finds it.

The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this third clause:

*But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little, will himself perfect you, and confirm you, and establish you*. [1Pt 5.10]

From God the Father comes down all the grace that works, co-operates and fulfils. Through Jesus Christ his Son, who has diligently sought and found us, like a lost coin, with the clay of our humanity and the light of his divinity, he has called us to eternal glory. When we have suffered a little in this world, he will perfect us with the double glorification of soul and body, he will confirm us in the eternal vision of him, and he will establish us in the blessed company of the Church Triumphant.

Let us then, dearest brothers, ask our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us, after the example of that holy woman, the penitent soul, to prepare a lamp by remembering our frailty, and with the wick of penance; to light the oil of mercy with the fire of divine charity, and with it turn out the corners of our conscience and diligently seek the long-lost coin of two-fold charity. When it is found, may we be found fit to come to him who is charity. May he grant this, to whom be honour and glory, dignity and power, for ever and ever. Let every created thing say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] cf. ARISTOTLE, *De historia animalium*, IX,40, 624a26-33

[2] JUVENAL, *Satura* 2,82; SENECA, *Epistola* 7

[3] "*Ante torum huius Virginis frequentate nobis dulcia cantica dramatis*"; *BREVIARIUM ROMANUM, Commune Festorum b.M.V., ad Matutinum*, I *nocturno antiphona* 3

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the fourth Sunday after Pentecost: *Be ye merciful*, which is divided into four clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for the preacher or prelate of the Church: *David, sitting in the chair*.)**

1. At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: *Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful*. [Lk 6.36]

It says in the second book of Kings, towards the end:

*David, sitting in the chair, the wisest chief among three, was like the most tender little worm of the wood; who killed eight hundred men at one onset*. [2Kg(Sm) 23.8]

David represents the preacher, who should 'sit in the chair, etc'. Take note of all the words. The 'chair' signifies humility of mind; 'wisest' implies clearness; the 'chief' is constancy; the 'three' are life, learning and eloquence; the 'wood' is the hard-heartedness of the wicked; 'most tender' indicates mercy and patience; and the 'little worm' is severe discipline. Thus the preacher must sit in the chair of humility, taught by the example of Jesus Christ, who humbled the glory of his divinity in the chair of our humanity. He should be 'wisest', savouring the charity which alone tastes *how sweet the Lord is* [cf. Ps 33.9]. He should be 'chief' in constancy of mind, so that like the lion, mightiest of beasts, he may fear the attack of none. He is 'among three', his life, learning and eloquence. He should also be the 'most tender little worm of the wood': a little worm that pierces and gnaws away the wood of the hard and unfruitful; 'tender', that is, patient and merciful towards the humble and contrite. Alternatively, just as there is nothing harder than a worm when it gnaws, but nothing softer when it is handled, so the preacher who sets forth the word of God should strike the hearts of his hearers hard; but if he is struck by insults, he should be gentle and friendly. This explains the phrase that follows, Who killed eight hundred at one onset. It says, 'one onset', on account of some people who, when they have killed pride, nurture a raging belly. The 'eight hundred' are the carnal and spiritual vices. The preacher should kill them all in himself, so as to perform works of mercy towards himself, and then towards others. That is why today's Gospel says, *Be merciful*, etc.

2. There are four things to notice in this Gospel. The first is the mercy of God, where it begins: *Be merciful*. Second is the measure of eternal glory: *Good measure*. Third is the fall of the blind men into the ditch: *And he spoke also to them a similitude*. Fourth, the mote in the brother's eye*: Why seest thou the mote in thy brother's eye?* We will **concord** with these clauses some stories from the second book of Kings.

In the Introit of today's Mass we sing: *The Lord is my light*; and we read the Epistle of St Paul to the Romans*: I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy*; which we will divide into four parts and **concord** with the four clauses of the Gospel. The first part is: *I reckon*; the second: *For the expectation of the creature*; the third: *We know*; the fourth: *Not only*, etc.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the threefold mercy of God and man: *Be merciful*.)**

3. Let us say, then:

*Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not; and you shall not be judged. Condemn not; and you shall not be condemned. Forgive; and you shall be forgiven. Give; and it shall be given to you*. [Lk 6.36-38]

In this first clause of the holy Gospel there are five things for us to notice especially: to be merciful, to judge not, to condemn not, to forgive, and to give. We will **concord** these five with five stories from the second book of Kings.

'Merciful' means having compassion on the miseries of others. 'Mercy' moves the heart with sorrow for the sorrow of another. In God, though, there is mercy without sorrow of heart: his pity is shown in merciful deeds. That is why the Lord says: *Be merciful*. And note: just as the heavenly Father's mercy towards you is three-fold, so yours should be three-fold towards your neighbour.

The Father's mercy is beautiful, broad and precious. It is beautiful, since it cleanses from vice: as Ecclesiasticus says:

*The mercy of God is beautiful in the time of affliction,*

*as a cloud of rain in the time of drought*. [Ecclus 35.26]

In the time of affliction, when the soul is afflicted for her sins, the rain of grace pours down to refresh the soul and forgive sin. It is broad, because as time goes by it expands in good works; as the Psalm says:

*For thy mercy is before my eyes: and I am well pleased with thy truth*, [Ps 25.3]

because I am displeased with my own sin. It is precious, in the delight of eternal life of which Anna [*sic*: he means Sara] speaks in Tobias: *This everyone is sure of that worshippeth thee*, etc. [Tob 3.21]. See in the Gospel: *No man can serve two masters* [Pentecost XV, clause 2]. Of these three Isaiah says:

*I will remember the tender mercies of the Lord,*

*the praise of the Lord for all the things that the Lord hath bestowed upon us:*

*and for the multitude of his good things to the house of Israel,*

*which he hath given them according to his kindness,*

*and according to the multitude of his mercies.* [Is 63.7]

Your mercy, too, should be three-fold towards your neighbour. If he sins against you, forgive him. If he strays from the way of truth, instruct him. If he is hungry, feed him. Of the first, Solomon says in Proverbs:

*By faith and mercy sins are purged away*. [Prov 15.27]

Of the second, James says:

*He who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way shall save his soul from death and shall cover a multitude of sins.* [Jas 5.20]

Of the third, the Psalm says:

*Blessed is he that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor*. [Ps 40.2]

So it is well said*: Be merciful, as your Father is merciful.*

**(On the nature of cranes and their significance.)**

4. There is a **concordance** to this in the second book of Kings, where David says to Mephiboseth:

*Fear not, for I will surely shew thee mercy for Jonathan thy father's sake; and I will restore the lands of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table always*. [2Kg (Sm) 9.7]

In this text the three-fold mercy towards neighbour is portrayed; the first, when it says, *I will surely shew thee mercy for Jonathan's sake*, that is, for Jesus Christ who said, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* [Lk 23.34]. You should show mercy to the one who offends you both in heart and in word, forgiving him with heart and voice. The second mercy is when it says, *I will restore all the lands of Saul thy father*. The land, which a man works on, represents the grace bestowed in Baptism, which we should so receive as to make it fruitful in good works. When Saul (the soul anointed with the oil of faith) died, all he owned was lost. When you cause someone to be converted from the error of his way, you restore that land to him. The third mercy is, *And thou shalt eat bread at my table always*. So Solomon says:

*If thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat; if he thirst, give him to drink*. [Prov 25.21]

So it is well said: *Be merciful.*

So let us be merciful, in imitation of the cranes, of which it is said[1] that when they seek to fly to any destination, they fly high, so that from their exalted view-point they may find the lands they seek. One, resolute in going, leads the flock; and as he goes he chides the laggards, urging on the line with his voice. If he grows hoarse, another takes over. All of them together take care of the weary, so that if any flag, they all come together to support those who are tired, until with rest they regain their strength. Nor is their care any less on the ground. They divide the night into watches, so that one tenth are awake at any time. Those that watch hold small stones in their claws, so that if they drop them they show they have been asleep. The noise indicates that they should be careful. They flee from bats. Let us then be merciful like cranes, so that being set on the watch-tower of an exalted life, we may look out for ourselves and for other people. Let us show the proper way to those who do not know it. Let us chide the lazy and lukewarm with the voice of preaching. Let us take turns in our work, because he who lacks a time of rest will not stay the course. Let us carry the weak and feeble on our shoulders, so that they do not faint in the way. Let us keep watch and vigil for the Lord in prayer and contemplation. Let us grasp the Lord's poverty, humility and bitter Passion, as in our claws; and if anything unclean tries to creep in, let us cry out at once. Above all, let us flee the blind bat of worldly vanity.

**(A sermon against those who rashly judge hidden things: *Oza put forth his hand*.)**

5. There follows, secondly, *Judge not; and you will not be judged*. The Gloss says, 'We are allowed to pass judgement on public evils, which cannot be done with a good conscience. There are things in between, uncertain, which may be done honestly, because they may be done either well or badly. We do not know how someone who now appears bad, and it would be rash to despair of his correction or dismiss him as a castaway.' *Judge not; and you will not be judged.*

There is a **concordance** to this in the second book of Kings, where it tells how

*Oza put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it: because the oxen kicked and made it lean aside. And the indignation of the Lord was enkindled against Oza: and he struck him for his rashness. And he died there before the ark of God*. [2Kg(Sm) 6.6-7]

The ark is the soul, and the oxen are the bodily senses. Oza (his name means ‘hard’) is anyone who is confident in his own rightness, and criticizes other people. When the oxen get skittish- that is, when the bodily senses get troublesome and contrary- the soul is sometimes inclined to give way to something wrong. If a judgemental person tries to take hold with the rash hand of criticism, he should realise that he himself incurs the judgement of the Lord, who said, *Judge not; and you will not be judged*. The Philosopher[2] says: "Look to your own faults, and spare other people’s."

**(A sermon against those who rejoice over the fate or death of an enemy: *David went up into the high chamber and wept*.)**

6. There follows thirdly*, Condemn not; and you will not be condemned*. There is a **concordance** in the second book of Kings, where David would not condemn Absalom, who wanted to condemn him.

*He commanded Joab and Abisai and Ethai, saying: Save me the boy Absalom*. [2Kg (Sm) 18.5]

When he was destroyed,

*David, much moved, went up to the high chamber and wept. And as he went he spoke in this manner: My son Absalom, Absalom my son! Who would grant me, that I might die for thee, Absalom my son, my son Absalom!* [2Kg(Sm) 18.33]

The death of an enemy is not something to rejoice over, but to mourn and weep for. So Christ went up to the high chamber of the Cross, there to weep for Adam and all his posterity, slain by Joab (the devil) with the three lances of greed, vainglory and avarice; and he said: My son Adam! *Who would grant me, that I might die for thee*; that is, that my death might profit you. It as if he said, No-one was willing to let me die for him! He reckons it a great gift, if a sinner ‘grants’ that his death should profit him!

**(A sermon for the formation of patience: *Semei cursed the king*, etc.)**

7. There follows, fourthly, *Forgive; and you will be forgiven*. There is a **concordance** to this in the second book of Kings, where it says that Semei cursed David, saying:

*Come out, come out, thou man of blood, and thou man of Belial. The Lord hath repaid thee for all the blood of the house of Saul: because thou hast usurped the kingdom in his stead. And the Lord hath given the kingdom into the hands of Absalom thy son: and behold, thy evils press upon thee, because thou art a man of blood. And Abisai the son*

*of Sarvia said to the king: Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? I will go, and cut off his head. And the king said: What have I to do with you, ye sons of Sarvia? Let him alone and let him curse: for the Lord hath bid him curse David. And who is he that shall dare say: Why hath he done so? And the king said to Abisai, and to all his servants: Behold, my son, who came forth from my bowels, seeketh my life. How much more now a son of Jemini? Let him alone that he may curse as the Lord hath bidden him. Perhaps the Lord may look upon my affliction, and the Lord may render me good for the cursing of this day. And David and his men went by the way. And Semei by the hill's side went over against him, cursing, and casting stones at him, and scattering earth.* [2Kg (Sm) 16.7-13]

St Gregory[3] says, "If anyone is the victim of insulting words, and is hard put to it to keep his patience, let him call to mind the behaviour of David, when Semei was hurling abuse, and his armed officers were eager to take revenge. He said, *What have I to do with you, sons of Sarvia?* and a little later, *Let him alone and let him curse as the Lord has commanded him*. These words show that when he was forced to flee from his rebellious son because of his sin with Bethsabee, he recalled the evil he himself had done; and he reckoned the insulting words not as an attack, but as an aid whereby he judged he might be cleansed and find mercy. We too will find it a good thing to bear abuse, if in the secrecy of our hearts we recall the bad things we have done. The injuries that afflict us will then seem light indeed, compared with the worse things we have deserved. So let it be that we repay insults with thanks, rather than with anger; for by accepting them as the judgement of God, we are spared worse penalties."

8. There follows, fifthly, *Give; and it shall be given to you*. There is a **concordance** to this in the second book of Kings where it says that

*Machir, his son Ammihel, and Berzillai the Galaadite brought David beds, and tapestry, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and meal, and parched corn, and beans, and lentils, and fried pulse, and honey, and butter, and sheep, and fat calves*. [2Kg(Sm) 17.27-28]

There is your *Give*: let us hear the *It shall be given*:

*King David said to Berzillai: Come with me that thou mayest rest secure with me in Jerusalem*. [2Kg(Sm) 19.33]

Let us see the moral significance of this.

Machir means 'seller', Ammihel is 'people of God', Berzillai is 'my strength' and Galaad is 'mound of witness'. These three men stand for all penitents, who sell what they have and give to the poor; who are the people of God *whom the Lord has chosen as his inheritance* [cf. Ps 32.12]; and who in the strength of good works overcome the assaults of the ancient enemy. In them is heaped up the witness of the Lord's Passion. These give Christ beds for sleepers, the quiet of a pure conscience in which Christ rests with

the soul; tapestries of different colours, the various virtues; earthen vessels, themselves, as they humble themselves and recognise that they are frail and made of clay; wheat, the teaching of the Gospel, and barley, the teaching of the Old Testament; meal, confession made of the tiniest circumstances of all their sins; the parched corn of patience, the beans of abstinence and the lentils of self-contempt; the fried pulse of compassion for others, the honey and butter of the active and contemplative life; the sheep of innocence and the fat calves of the mortification of pampered flesh. If you give these things, it shall be given to you to hear the true David say: *Come with me that thou mayest rest secure with me* in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Note these four expressions: come, rest, secure with me, in Jerusalem. These four correspond to the four things we sing of in the Introit of today's Mass:

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; [whom shall I fear?*

*The Lord is the protector of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

*My enemies that trouble me have themselves been weakened, and have fallen.]* [Ps 26.1-2]

[The Lord is my light and my salvation] is **concordant** with the word *Come*; you cannot come rightly unless you have been enlightened. And my salvation is **concordant** with *that thou mayest rest*. Where there is salvation, there is rest. *The Lord is the protector of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?* is **concordant** with *secure with me*; and *My enemies that trouble me have themselves been weakened, and have fallen*, is **concordant** with *in Jerusalem*, wherein we shall not fear the enemies who now trouble us; they will fall into Gehenna, and we shall be in glory.

So the first part of the Epistle is **concordant** with this first clause of the Gospel:

*For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us.* [Rom 8.18]

Because sufferings are temporary, they are not worthy to be compared. They are light and transitory. Suffering passes, but glory remains for ever and ever.

And so, that we may attain that glory, let us ask the Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful father, so to pour his mercy upon us, that we ourselves may have mercy upon ourselves and upon others; that we may judge no-one, condemn no-one, forgive everyone who sins against us and give what we have to everyone who asks of us. May he himself graciously grant this, who is blessed and glorious for ever and ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the threefold measure and its meaning: *Good measure*.)**

9. There follows, secondly:

*Good measure and pressed down and shaken together and running over shall they give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you shall mete withal it shall be measured to you again*. [Lk 6.38]

The measure is three-fold: of faith, of penitence and of glory. The measure of faith is 'good' in the reception of the sacraments; it is 'pressed down' (that is, full) in the performance of good works; it is 'shaken together' in suffering or martyrdom for the name of Christ; and it is 'running over' in final perseverance. Of this measure, the Apostle says:

*According as God hath divided to every one the measure of faith*. [Rom 12.3]

The measure of penitence is 'good' in contrition, wherein God's goodness is recognised; it is 'pressed down' in confession, which should be made in full; it is 'shaken together' in satisfaction; and 'running over' in the remission of all sin and in purity of mind. Of this measure, the book of Wisdom says:

*Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight*. [Wisd 11.21]

All things, meaning the whole salvation of the soul, as to which all that should be done is done, and everything a man does should be related. *Thou hast ordered*, Lord God, in the measure of penitence; which, to be true, must have number and weight: number in confession, that all the circumstances of sin be numbered to the end; and weight in satisfaction, that the penalty be of equal weight to the fault. This is the 'sanctuary weight', not the 'common weight'.

**(A sermon against those who glory in beauty, and who confess once a year and never perform satisfaction: *Moreover as Absalom*.)**

10. There is a **concordance** to this in the second book of Kings:

*But in all Israel there was not a man so comely, and so exceedingly beautiful as Absalom: from the sole of the foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he polled his hair (so fully it grew) he was polled once a year, because his hair was burdensome to him; and he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred sicles, according to the common weight*. [2Kg(Sm) 14.25-26]

Absalom's beauty, which began from the soles of his feet and went up to the crown of his head, stands for that beauty which comes from earthly things, in which there is thought to be no blemish as long as its prosperity meets no adversity. The beauty which

comes down from above represents the beauty that comes about from the knowledge of heavenly things, to which the Gospel refers when the Lord says: *Why do thoughts arise in your hearts?* [Lk 24.38]. Those thoughts that 'arise' in the heart are of earthly things; those that come down are of heavenly things.

There follows: *He was polled once a year*. The cutting off of superfluous hair is the putting away of sins in confession, which many people do only once a year, even though they need confession every day! Because human nature is frail and liable to sin, and because every day it contracts the dirt of so many sins, and because its memory is so poor that it hardly remembers in the evening what it did in the morning, why does the wretch put it off for a year? Indeed, why put it off till tomorrow, when he does not know what tomorrow will bring? Here today, and gone tomorrow! So live today, then, as if you were to die tomorrow. Nothing is surer than death, nothing less sure than the hour of death. If you drink the poison of sin every day, you should take the antidote of confession every day. The Philosopher[4] says, "He who has nothing in his mind except to live, does not live at all."

There follows: *He weighed the hair of his head at two hundred sicles, according to the common weight*. But he ought to have weighed it at three hundred! The sinner should weigh his sins at three hundred shekels, that is, with a three-fold penalty: perfect contrition, perfect confession and perfect satisfaction. But he weighs it at two hundred, because there are many who, though quite contrite and properly confessed, lack the third shekel of satisfaction. Nor do they weigh their sins by 'sanctuary weight', as God and the saints judge their gravity, but by 'common weight', vulgar opinion which gives short weight. To show that this is not enough, John the Baptist said:

*Ye offspring of vipers (poisonous sons of poisonous stock), who hath shewed you to flee from the wrath to come?* [Lk 3.7]

As if to say, you have not learned how to flee properly, since he who despises satisfaction does not escape the wrath. So he adds, *Bring forth fruits worthy of penance*. He says 'fruits', for seed, flower and fruit are three different things. The seed is contrition, the flower is confession, and the fruit is satisfaction. He who lacks this, lacks the perfection of penitence.

**(A sermon on the four gifts of the body: *Good measure*.)**

11. The measure of glory is referred to in this Gospel*, Good measure*, etc. By this, we are given to understand four gifts of the body, namely agility, subtlety, brightness and impassibility. As has been said, glorified bodies will be brighter than the sun, swifter than the wind, finer than a spark and incapable of suffering any injury. So it is said[5] that the Lord put on brightness on Mount Thabor [Mt 14.25]; agility when he walked on the water [Mt 17.2]; subtlety when he passed through the midst of them and went his way [Lk 4.30]; and impassibility when he was eaten by the disciples under the appearance of bread [Lk 22.19], yet suffered no harm. Again, *The just shall shine* (brightness), and *shall*

*run to and fro* (agility) *like sparks* (subtlety) *among the reeds* [Wisd 3.7]; and *their name liveth for ever* (impassibility) [Ecclus 44.14], for they can neither die nor fail.

Alternatively, the ‘good measure’ is joy without grief; ‘pressed down’ means full, with no empty space; ‘shaken together’ means firmness without looseness, as something shaken is made solid; and ‘running over’ means love without pretence. Each will rejoice over the other’s reward, and so love will overflow towards the other. The poor will give this measure; that is, they will be the reason that God gives, for it will be the occasion for his approval.

*Into thy bosom*: as Job says, *This hope is laid up in my bosom* [Job 19.27]. The bosom is as it were a receptacle, a haven. It represents the quiet of eternal life, in which the saints, freed from the storms of this world, are received as in a haven of rest. Or, as a little child who is crying returns to his mother’s breast, and she comforts him and dries his tears, so the saints will return from this weeping world to the bosom of glory, where *God will wipe away every tear from every face* [cf Apoc 7.17; 21.4].

The same measure, etc. St Augustine[6] says, "In his own will the good man measures out good deeds; in return he is meted out blessedness. In his own will, the bad man measures out bad deeds; in return he is meted out sorrow. Therefore in the same measure (even if not for eternal evils), eternal punishments are meted out; and because he wanted to have the enjoyments of sin for ever, he will find an everlasting and severe punishment."

12. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause:

*For the expectation of the creature waiteth for the revelation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity; not willingly, but by reason of him that made it subject, in hope. Because the creature also itself shall be delivered from the servitude of corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.* [Rom 8.19-21]

Note that the word ‘creature’ occurs three times in this second part, corresponding to the three aforesaid measures of faith, penitence and glory. In this place, ‘creature’ means the Church of the faithful. It says, then, *the expectation of the creature* (meaning the whole Church) *waiteth for the revelation of the sons of God*. That is, those who by faith are God’s children in the Church wait for glory. When they are revealed in it, they will contemplate God face to face, whereas now they contemplate him under a veil, *through a glass in a dark manner* [cf. 1Cor 13.12]. The creature was made subject to vanity, mutability, because as Solomon says, *the just man falls seven times a day* [cf. Prov 24.16]; not willingly, because there is no sin in his will, to whom was said*, Go, and now sin no more* [Jn 8.11]. He bears this mutability patiently for God’s sake, who subjected him, or willed and permitted him to be subjected, in the hope of eternal life. So there is added: It shall be delivered from the servitude of this corruption and mutability, changed into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. Therein he will receive ‘good measure’ in the fulfilling of the Age of Christ, ‘pressed down’ in fulfilment of soul, ‘shaken together’

in the bestowal of the double robe, and 'running over' in the perpetuity of common joy.

We ask you, then, Lord Jesus Christ, that by the measure of faith you will divide to us the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and fill us by the measure of penitence; so that afterwards you may satisfy us with thy countenance in the measure of glory. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A sermon against blind prelates of the Church: *All ye beasts of the field*.)**

13. There follows, thirdly:

*And he spoke also to them a similitude: Can the blind lead the blind? Do they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master; but every one shall be perfect, if he be as his master*. [Lk 6.39-40]

Let us see what is meant, allegorically, by the blind, the ditch, the disciple and the master. The 'blind' is the wicked prelate or priest, deprived of the light of life and knowledge. So Isaiah says of the blind prelates of the Church:

*All ye beasts of the field, come to devour, all ye beasts of the forest.*

*His watchmen are all blind. They are all ignorant:*

*dumb dogs not able to bark, seeing vain things, sleeping and loving dreams.*

*And most impudent dogs, they never had enough: the shepherds themselves knew no understanding.*

*All have turned aside into their own way, every one after his own gain, from the first even to the last.*

*Come, let us take wine and be filled with drunkenness: and it shall be as today, so also tomorrow, and much more*. [Is 56.9-12]

The beasts of the field are the demons, the beasts of the forest are the movements of the flesh, which devour the Church and the faithful soul. Why is this? Surely because the watchmen of the Church are all blind, deprived of the light of life and knowledge. They are dumb dogs, with the devil's sop in their mouths, and so unable to bark against the wolf. They see vain things, because they preach for money; seeking contrition from souls while shamefully saying, *Peace, peace. And there is no peace* [Jer 6.14; Ezek 13.10]. They sleep in their sins, they love dreams, those temporal things which delude those who love them. They are most impudent dogs, *having a harlot's forehead, refusing to*

*blush* [Jer 3.3]. They never have enough, always saying, *Bring, bring; and never, It is enough* [cf. Prov 30.15]. These *shepherds who feed themselves* [Jude 1.12] have no understanding, of which the Prophet says*: I will understand in the unspotted way* [Ps 100.2].

They have all turned aside into their own way, not that of Jesus Christ; every one after his own gain. *This is their dark and slippery way* [Ps 34.6], from first even to last, from the chief pig down to the smallest piglet. They invite themselves, Come, let us take wine*, wherein is lust* [Eph 5.18], and be filled with drunkenness, which *takes away the heart* [Hos 4.11], and it shall be as today. But believe me, it will not be as tomorrow! So the book of Maccabees says:

*The glory of the sinner is dung and worms.*

*Today he is lifted up, and tomorrow he shall not be found,*

*because he is returned into his earth, and his thought is come to nothing*. [1Mac 3.62-63]

Jacob said, in Genesis:

*My justice shall answer for me tomorrow.* [Gen 30.33]

Impudent dogs, today drunkenness abounds in you; but tomorrow, in the day of judgement, an eternity of death will answer. So in the Apocalypse it says:

*As much as she hath glorified herself and lived in delicacies,*

*so much torment and sorrow give ye her*. [Apoc 18.7]

**(On the nature of the bear, and its moral significance.)**

14. Again, these blind men, bearing witness to their own malice, say in the same Prophet:

*We have groped for the wall, and like the blind we have groped as if we had no eyes.*

*We have stumbled at noon-day as in darkness: we are in dark places as dead men.*

*We shall roar all of us like bears*. [Is 59.10-11]

Note these four: the wall, with no eyes, at noon-day, like bears. The wall is temporal abundance, the eyes are life and knowledge, the noon-day is high ecclesiastical dignity, and the bears are gluttony and lust. These men grope for the wall of riches as if it were something soft, although there are piercing thorns. Though they lack the eyes of life and

knowledge, they grab these things and make them the guide of their way, lacking the guidance of reason. At noon-day, the light of ecclesiastical preferment, they stumble as in the dark, because they are blinded by the very things that ought to give them light. And like bears, greedy and lustful, they roar for the honey of temporal sweetness.

The bear is said to form its young with its mouth; they say that after thirty days pregnancy, they are born without shape. And so it happens, that premature fertility creates shapeless births. They bring forth pieces of flesh, white in colour, with no eyes; and as they quickly grow to maturity, everything turns red except the extremities of the claws. By licking, they gradually shape them and meanwhile nourish them at the breast, so that by carefully holding them close they warm them, and draw out the animal spirit. During this time they eat nothing. Indeed, for the first fourteen days the mothers fall into a sleep, so that they cannot be roused even by injuries. They lie hidden in labour for four months, and then, when they come freely into the daylight, they suffer so much from the brightness of the light that you would think they had been struck blind. The bear's head is weak, his greatest strength is in his arms and legs. They creep into the hives of bees, because they have a great appetite for honeycomb, and are greedy for nothing more than honey. When they eat the fruit of the mandrake, they die; but they wander about seeking a remedy, so that the fruit will not grow strong to harm them, and eat ants to recover their health.

The 'bears' of our time, soft-living prelates, bring to birth dead lumps of flesh, carnal children whose colour is white like *tombs full of all filthiness* [cf. Mt 23.27]. These have no eyes to contemplate God or neighbour, no shape of virtues, no beauty of morals: only blood-red sins, and claws with which to seize the goods of the poor. As the bears lick and fawn upon these lumps of flesh, they shape them little by little, according to that fashion of which it is said*: The fashion of this world passeth away* [1Cor 7.31]. Warming them carefully with bad example, they draw out the animal spirit of which the Apostle says: *The sensual man perceiveth not the things of God* [1Cor 2.14]. So, like beasts among beasts, like blind with blind, they fall into the ditch. We should note, further, that just as the bear's head is weak, so the mind of the Church's prelates is weak, unable to resist the temptations of the devil; but in their arms and legs there is great strength for rapine and lust. They creep into the hives of the bees- the houses of the poor- with a great appetite for the honeycombs of praise and vainglory, *salutations in the market-place, the first places at feasts and the first chairs in the synagogues* [Mt 23.6-7], which they deny to their inferiors. When they eat the fruit of the mandrake, they die.

**(A sermon for on Nativity of the Lord: *Ruben, going out in the time of the wheat harvest*.)**

15. The mandrake is an aromatic herb, whose fruit has a beautiful scent like that of the Matian apple. The fruits of the mandrake represent the works of the just, at whose fragrant scent the bears roar and die. To them, as the Apostle says, *it is the odour of death unto death* [2Cor 2.16]. Of these mandrakes the Bride says in the Canticles: *The mandrakes give a smell in our gates* [Cant 7.13]. In the gates of the Church, the saints give forth the scent of a good life. Of these, Genesis also says:

*Ruben, going out in the time of the wheat harvest into the field, found mandrakes*. [Gen 30.14]

Ruben (meaning 'son of vision') stands for Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Father*, on whom the angels desire to look* (1Pt 1.12]. Going forth from the Father's side, he came to the field of this world at the time of the wheat harvest, the fulness of time in which, by Joseph's labour, the corn was gathered into the barn of the blessed Virgin, lest all Egypt should perish from hunger. And he found mandrakes, the Apostles and the Apostles' successors, at whose scent the roaring bears die. They say, as the book of Wisdom says:

*They are contrary to our doings, and upbraid us with transgressions of the law,*

*and divulge against us the sins of our way of life.*

*They are become censurers of our thoughts. They are grievous unto us, even to behold;*

*for their life is not like other men's, and their ways are very different.*

*We are esteemed by them as triflers, and they abstain from our ways as from filthiness.*

*These things the unhappy men thought, and were deceived*. [cf. Wisd 2.12,14-16,21]

And so they turn to ants, the trivialities of the world, whose false delights they believe to be medicinal for them. But the ant-eater will come, the 'ant-lion', the devil, who will devour both the blind bears and the ants.

There is a **concordance** to these blind men in the second book of Kings, where it tells how

*David offered a reward to whosoever should strike the Jebusites and get up into the gutters of the tops of the houses, and take away the blind and the lame that hated the soul of David. Therefore it is said in the proverb: The blind and the lame shall not come into the temple*. [2Kg(Sm) 5.8]

Note the three words: strike, get up, and take away. The true David, Jesus Christ, will give the reward of eternal life to whoever will strike the Jebusite who lives on the earth, the appetite of his flesh; who will get up into the gutters of the housetops, the water-channels of the buildings, by imitating the examples of the saints; and remove the lame and the blind. These are the prelates and priests who are lame in both feet- affection and action- and blind in both eyes- life and knowledge. They hate the soul of Jesus Christ when they offer their own souls, for which he laid down his life, for sale to the devil. The blind and the lame should not come into the temple, and yet today the temple itself is

committed to their care. By their blind guardianship many are made blind, and with them fall equally into the ditch of damnation. It is well said, then: *If the blind leads the blind, they both fall into a ditch*.

**(A sermon on his Passion: *King David went over*.)**

16. There follows: *A disciple is not above his master*. The Gloss says: 'If the master who is God does not take revenge for the injuries done to him, but wants to soften his persecutors by his forbearance, his human disciples should imitate this rule of perfection.' And so there is a **concordance** to this in the second book of Kings, where it says that:

*King David went over the brook Cedron: and all the people marched towards the way that looketh to the desert... But David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, going up and weeping, walking barefoot, and with his head covered: and all the people that were with him went up with their heads covered, weeping*. [2Kg(Sm) 15.23,30]

Allegorically, David represents Christ. Cedron means 'bitter grief'. The brook Cedron which David went over is the bitter Passion which Christ endured. So we read in John,

*Jesus went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron*. [Jn 18.1]

After him the people went to the olive-grove; because in his Passion Christ went ahead and the people followed, the disciples after their master, to witness his mercy. The king went with head covered, for Christ went up mount Olivet with his divinity covered by his humanity; and barefoot, thereby showing his humanity. The people, too, went with heads covered, but we do not read that their feet were bare. We should not uncover the mind's secrets with boastful voice; nor should our feet be bare, but shod with the examples of the saints. As Jeremiah says:

*Keep thy foot from being bare and thy throat from thirst*. [Jer 2.25]

We should not let the foot of our affection be bare of virtue, nor let our throat thirst from avarice. The vinegar and the gall of our Lord's Passion should slake our thirst. Just as the doctor drinks the medicine first, the master tasted so that the disciple should not fear to taste. It is enough for him to be like his master.

17. The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** with this third clause:

*For we know that every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain, even till now*. [Rom 8.22]

Note the two words, groans and travails. The master 'groaned' in working miracles: as Mark says,

*Looking up to heaven, he groaned and said to him: Ephphetha, which is, Be thou opened*. [Mk 7.34]

He travailed in the agony of the Passion; as Isaiah says:

*Shall not I that make others to bring forth children, myself bring forth?* [Is 66.9]

So the master's disciples, his creation, should groan in contrition and travail in confession. It is enough for the disciple if he is like his master.

We ask you, then, master and Lord, good Jesus, to enlighten the blind, to teach your disciples, and show them the way of life; whereby they may be able to reach you, who are the way and the life. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[FOURTH CLAUSE]

**(A sermon against those who, being themselves unclean, want to cleanse the uncleanness of others: *Why do you see the mote*.)**

18. There follows, fourthly:

*And why seest thou the mote in thy brother's eye; but the beam that is in thy own eye thou considerest not? Or how canst thou say to thy brother: Brother, let me pull the mote out of thy eye, when thou thyself seest not the beam in thy own eye? Hypocrite, cast first the beam out of thy own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to take out the mote from thy brother's eye*. [Lk 6.41-42]

Note these three: mote, eye and beam. The mote represents a slight fault, the eye is reason or understanding, the beam is a grave fault. The Gloss says: Truly, a sinner cannot criticize a sinner!'

And so there is a **concordance** in the second book of Kings, where it tells how the Lord forbade David to build the temple [cf. 2Kg(Sm) 7.12-13]. St Gregory[7] says: "He who would correct another must be clean in himself from vice, so as not to think of earthly things, and not give way to base desires. Then he will see more clearly what others should avoid, the more truly he himself keeps away from them by knowledge and life. The eye cannot see clearly in itself the spot of dust that irritates it; and the hand that holds mud cannot brush off dirt." "If you want to reprove someone, first see if you are like him. If you are, groan equally and do not conform him to yourself. Rather, warn him, and tell him to try with you. Even if you are not like him, you used to be and you could be again: so put yourself on his level and confront him with mercy, not with hate. Only rarely, and in the greatest need, should threats be given, and then only in respect of God, and with the beam removed from your own eye." It is well said, then, *Why seest thou the mote in thy brother's eye*, etc.

**(On the eyes, their explanation and significance.)**

19. And note that the eyes are covered with the eyelids and eyelashes, to protect them from accidental injury. They have a hidden light, secret and within. Of all the senses, these are nearest to the soul. The eyes contain the whole judgement of the mind. If there is sadness or happiness in the soul, it appears in the eyes. The eyes are enclosed in hollow cavities in the face, the front or fore-head. The eyes are like jewels, covered with translucent membranes through which, as if through glass, the bright mind looks out upon the outside world. In the middle of the eye are what we call the pupils, which hold the power of seeing.

We should know that the eye may happen to be large, small or in between. The middle size represents a good disposition in judgement and understanding and sound doctrine. Sometimes eyes are prominent or deep-set, or in between. If they are deep-set, it indicates acuteness; if they are prominent, it indicates disturbed judgement and an evil disposition; the middle state is to be preferred, for it signifies goodness. Sometimes the eyes are almost shut, and sometimes wide open and hardly moving, and sometimes in between. If they are wide open or staring, it means stupidity or immodesty; if they are almost closed, it indicates mobility, light judgement, not fixed on what they are doing. In between the two, it means a good disposition, and sound judgement in every work.

20. There follows*: Hypocrite, first cast out.* The doctor who cannot cure himself is not the most suitable to treat another. The hypocrite's evil eye is wide open to see other people's faults, but cannot see his own failings. As the Poet[8] says:

"Blind man, when you peer at your own faults with ointment on your eyes,

How are you so clear-sighted when you look at your friends' shortcomings?"

If only the eye, that sees everything else, could see itself!

The fourth part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this fourth clause:

*And not only it, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption of the sons of God.*[Rom 8.23]

The first-fruits of the Spirit are contrition and sorrow for sins, which are the first things to offer to the Lord. The saints have these, and do not consider even the beam in another's eye. They judge no-one, they condemn no-one. They groan within themselves in bitterness of soul, waiting for their adoption, the immortality of the body.

May he who died for us make us partakers of his immortality, he who rose from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom is honour and glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Let every merciful soul say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

SOLINUS, *Polyhistor*, 15

[2] PUBLIUS SYRUS, *Sententiae*, 95

[3] *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on 2Kg(Sm) 16.10

[4] cf. PUBLIUS SYRUS, *Sententiae*, 429: "They live badly, who think they will live for ever."

[5] INNOCENT III, sermon 14, PL 217.381,382

[6] AUGUSTINE, *Epistola* 102, *quaestio* 4.26-27; PL 33.381

[7] *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on 2Kg(Sm) 7.3 and on Lk 6.42

[8] HORACE, *Satyrae*, I,3,25-26

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the fifth Sunday after Pentecost: *When the multitude pressed upon Jesus*; which is divided into four clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for prelates and preachers of the Church, and how they should behave: *King Solomon... on the doors of the oracle*.)**

1. *At that time: When the multitude pressed upon Jesus to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Genesareth*. [Lk 5.1]

It says in the third book of Kings that King Solomon, on the doors of the oracle which were made of olive wood,

*carved upon them figures of cherubims, and figures of palm-trees, and carvings very much projecting: and he overlaid them with gold. And he covered both the cherubims and the palm-trees, and the other things with gold*. [3(1)Kg 6.32]

The doors, that bar the way to enemies, represent preachers who should oppose themselves to enemies, like a wall before the oracle of the Lord, the Church Militant. These doors should be of olive wood, characterised by constancy and mercy. The wood of the olive tree is hard, signifying constancy; while its Greek name, *elaia*, is similar to the word *eleos*, meaning ‘mercy’. These two qualities should be found in the preachers and prelates of the Church, through whom is opened the door of the kingdom. On them our Solomon, Jesus Christ, who *preached peace to those who were near and to those who were far off* [cf. Eph 2.17], has carved cherubims, which stand for the fullness of knowledge, palm-trees and ‘carvings’ (the word implies ‘chisel-work’, engraving). The cherubims stand for angelic life and full knowledge, the palm-trees for the triple victory over the enemy, and the carvings for the example of good works.

First, though, we should note that by the Lord’s command Moses made two cherubims of beaten gold, as Exodus tells [Ex 25.18]. Solomon made them of olive wood, as the third book of Kings says. Three reasons can be given for this. First, to indicate that as long as the children of Israel were in the desert with Moses, they deserved to be beaten with many a scourge; but in the promised Land, under Solomon, they were peaceful and quiet. He himself says in the third book of Kings:

*Now the Lord God hath given me rest round about:*

*and there is no adversary nor evil occurrence.* [3(1)Kg 5.4]

The second reason is this: while the preacher is in the exercise of preaching, he is as it were beaten by various trials, to broaden his charity and lengthen his patience; but when he leaves the crowd in the valley, and returns to the mountain of vision, he contemplates God with a quiet mind and a joyful heart. The third reason is, that the just man is beaten by many flails in the wilderness of this flesh, but in the heavenly Jerusalem he will gaze face to face upon the Immortal, himself immortal like the glorious cherubim. The cherubim stand for angelic life and full knowledge, and the preacher should have both, so that he lives holily and preaches fully; not sparing anyone either from fear or from love, from reverence or from embarrassment. The palm-trees represent victory over the world, the flesh and the devil: the victor carries a palm-branch in his hand. The carvings, very much projecting, are the most clear examples of good works, which should be so carved in the sight of all that they can in no way be interpreted unfairly or cynically.

Note, too, that these three should be overlaid with gold: the cherubim of knowledge with the gold of humility, because *knowledge puffeth up* [1Cor 8.1]; the palms of victory with the gold of divine mercy, so as to ascribe victory to the Lord, not to yourself- he says, Have confidence, I have overcome the world [Jn 16.33]; the carvings of works with the gold of fraternal charity, so as to seek others' glory, not one's own. If these three are carved on the doors of the oracle, then the crowds who see such wonderful and beautiful carvings will press towards the entrance to the oracle, desiring to hear the word of God. Whence today's Gospel says: When the multitude pressed upon Jesus.

2. There are four things to note in this Gospel. First, Jesus Christ standing by the lake of Genesareth, with the two ships: *When the multitude pressed*. Second, Christ's going up into Simon's ship: *And going up into one ship that was Simon's*. Third, the great catch of fish: *Simon, answering, said to him: Master, we have laboured all the night*. Fourth, the astonishment of Peter and his companions, and how they left all they had: *Which when Simon Peter saw*, etc.

Note that on this and the following Sunday we shall, by God's grace, **concord** several stories from the third book of Kings with this and the following Gospel. In the Introit of today's Mass we sing: *O Lord, hear my voice*; and the Epistle is read from St Peter: *Be ye all of one mind*, which we will divide into four parts and **concord** with the four clauses of the Gospel. The first part is: *Be ye all of one mind*. The second is: *For he that will love life*. The third is: *And who is he that can hurt you?* The fourth is: *But sanctify the Lord Christ.*

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the Incarnation of Christ and on his Passion, and on the just man's**

**way of life; on the three trees which were in paradise, and on the nature and meaning of the cedar and the hyssop: *Solomon treated about trees*.)**

3. Let us say, then:

When the multitude pressed upon Jesus to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of *Genesareth. And he saw two ships standing by the lake; but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets*. [Lk 5.1-2]

There is a **concordance** to this in the third book of Kings, where it says that:

*Solomon treated about trees, from the cedar that is in Libanus, unto the hyssop that cometh out of the wall: and he discoursed of beasts, and of fowls, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And they came from all nations to hear the wisdom of Solomon and from all the kings of the earth who heard his wisdom.* [3(1)Kg 4.33-34]

The hyssop is a lowly herb that clings to the rock, and it represents the humility of Christ, who treated from the cedar to the hyssop inasmuch as he came down from the height of heavenly glory to the humility of the flesh. Alternatively, the cedar stands for the pride of the wicked, as in*: The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars* [Ps 28.5]. Christ treats from the cedar to the hyssop, because he judges the hearts of the proud and of the humble. He also treated upon a tree when he hung upon the Cross. He then brought down the cedar, the arrogance of the world, to the lowliness of the hyssop, the folly of the Cross.

*For the word of the cross, to them indeed that perish, is foolishness;*

*but to them that are saved it is the power of God*. [1Cor 1.18]

Morally. *Solomon treated about trees*, etc. In paradise there were three trees: the tree of which Adam used to eat, the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. These three trees are three powers: memory, will and reason. The fruit of memory is delight; the fruit of the will is good action; the fruit of reason is the discernment of good and evil. To 'treat' is to make enquiry by the various processes of reason, so as to arrive at the truth of a matter. The just man treats of these three trees, enquiring by the processes of reason whether he has placed and kept the goods of the Lord in the treasury of his memory: the humility and poverty of his Incarnation, the sweetness of his preaching, the Passion of Christ who was obedient even to the Cross. Whether he has loved God and neighbour with his will, and whether he has made a rational distinction between good and evil. This is the discourse of the just man, who treats even from the cedar that is in Libanus unto the hyssop that comes out of the wall.

Note that the cedar is a tall tree. Its scent is sweet, and its wood is too hard to be destroyed by wood-worm. Its scent drives serpents away, and when it is put in the fire it becomes wrinkled. The cedar is the life of the just man: tall in the elevation of a holy way of life, sweet-scented by example and good repute, enduring in the firmness of holy

intention, indestructible by the worm of deadly concupiscence, driving away the demons by compunction of mind, and repressing the motions of the flesh by self-discipline. It 'wrinkles', shrinking from its own will, in the fire of obedience. This cedar is in Libanus (which means 'whiteness'), because the just man's life consists in the whiteness of inward and outward purity. He treats from the cedar to the hyssop which comes from the wall. The hyssop is humility; the wall, flat and even, represents the unity of the saints. So the just man treats on the cedar of his life, mentally reviewing whether his life accords with the humility and unity of the saints.

4. What follows concerns Christ: *He discoursed of beasts*, etc. The 'beasts' represent the gluttonous and lustful; the 'birds' are the proud; the 'creeping things' are the avaricious; and the 'fish' are the over-critical. He treated of beasts when he said:

*Take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life*; [Lk 21.34]

of birds, when he said:

*The birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head*; [Mt 8.20]

of creeping things, when he said:

*Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth; where the rust and moth consume*, etc. [Mt 6.19]

and of fish, when he said:

*Woe to you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites, because you go ropund about the sea and the land (that is, the whole world) to make one proselyte (Gentile convert), and, when he is made, you make him the child of hell twofold more than yourselves*.[Mt 23.15]

When he sees your vices, he goes back to his paganism and by this backsliding deserves even greater punishment.

There follows*: And they came from all nations to hear the wisdom of Solomon*. And this is what is said in today's Gospel: *When the multitude pressed upon Jesus to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Genesareth*. A lake has the property of generating a breeze which accompanies the movement of its waves; yet it is a standing water, which does not flow away. It represents this present age, whose ups and downs may give rise to worldly praise, but it soon passes- as the Psalm says, *Their memory hath perished with a noise* [Ps 9.7], the applause and favour of the world. And just as waters are pent up in a lake, and do not flow away, so in this world the freedom of sinners is restricted, so that they are unable to find pleasure in their delights as much as they

would like. So Luke tells how the prodigal son would have liked to fill his belly with the husks of swine, yet no one would give him anything [cf. Lk 15.16]. The 'husks of swine' mean the various pleasures of sin, with which the evil spirits are fattened like pigs. Often, they are not given to those who desire them: man sins more often than the devil tempts. Often, man anticipates the devil, if the devil does not get to him first. So Ezekiel says:

*I will deliver thee up to the will of the daughters of the Philistines,*

*that are ashamed of thy wicked way.* [Ezek 16.27]

Shame indeed, if the devil blushes for a man's sin, which he has not suggested; while the wretched man himself does not blush for his own sin!

5. So, Jesus stood by the lake, this world, so that he might preach God's word to the lovers of this world. He stood beside it, because though he lived in this world, he despised, and taught us to despise, the worldly glory that is like a deep lake. There is a **concordance** to this in the third book of Kings, where it says that:

*Elias found Eliseus the son of Saphat, ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen. And he was one of them that were ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen. And when Elias came up to him, he cast his mantle upon him. And he forthwith left the oxen and ran after Elias, and said: Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said to him: Go, and return back; for that which was my part, I have done to thee. And returning back from him, he took a yoke of oxen, and killed them, and boiled the flesh with the plough of the oxen, and gave to the people, and they ate*. [3(1)Kg 19.19-21]

Morally. Our Redeemer, coming down from heaven, acquired a people by divine judgement, while they were still gaping at earthly works. He made salvation in them, when he converted them to faith. Elijah means 'the Lord is God', Saphat is 'judging', Elisha is 'salvation of my God'. The prophet cast his mantle over him, when the Lord clothed his people with the catholic faith. So the Apostle says: *You who have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ* [Gal 3.27]. He forthwith left the oxen and ran after Elias, because the choir of the chosen, as soon as they hear the words*: Every one of you that doth not renounce all that he possesseth cannot be my disciple* [Lk 14.33], stop gaping at earthly riches and serving worldly desires, and go to preach the word of life to others. This is 'kissing father and mother', the wish to correct with a word whoever one can, whether Jew or Gentile.

*He took a yoke of oxen*, etc. This means flesh and spirit, whose 'flesh' (carnal desires) we should boil with the 'plough' of heart-felt contrition, and give to the people to eat. In this way, we feed with the example of true penitence those whom we have scandalized by our evil life.

**(A sermon on the two harlots and their children, and what they mean: *There came two harlots*.)**

6. There follows: *And he saw two ships*, etc. These two ships are Jerusalem and Babylon, Paradise and Egypt, Abel and Cain, Jacob and Esau: that is, the congregation of true penitents and the guilty gathering of worldlings. All humanity is divided into these two groups. They are the two harlots, concerning which there is a **concordance** in the third book of Kings, where it says that there came two women that were harlots, to king Solomon. (It was fitting that harlots came to him, who later led him astray!)

*And one of them said: I beseech thee, my lord, I and this woman dwelt in one house, and I was delivered of a child with her in the chamber. And the third day, after that I was delivered, she also was delivered: and we were together, and no other person with us in the house, only we two. And this woman's child died in the night: for in her sleep she overlaid him. And rising in the dead time of the night, she took my child from my side, while I thy handmaid was asleep, and laid it in her bosom: and laid her dead child in my bosom. And when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold, it was dead: but considering him more diligently when it was clear day, I found that it was not mine which I bore. And the other woman answered: It is not so as thou sayest, but thy child is dead, and mine is alive. On the contrary she said: Thou liest; for my child liveth, and thy child is dead. And in this manner they strove before the king. Then said the king: Bring me a sword. And when they had brought a sword before the king, Divide, saith he, the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other. But the woman whose child was alive said to the king (for her bowels were moved upon her child): I beseech thee, my lord, give her the child alive, and do not kill it. But the other said: Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it. The king answered, and said: Give the living child to this woman, and let it not be killed; for she is the mother thereof*. [3(1)Kg 3.16-22,24-27]

Harlots are women who earn their living from lust. These two harlots stand for two ways of life, namely, of true penitents and of carnal folk. But pay attention! We represent the life of true penitents by a harlot, not because it is prostitution, since it is already converted to its spouse; but because it used to be prostitution when it was still clinging to the devil. There is something similar in Luke: *When Jesus was in the house of Simon the leper* [Mk 14.3], meaning, not that he was a leper, but that he had been a leper. These lives are the two rods of which Zechariah says:

*And I took unto me two rods: one I called Beauty, and the other I called a Cord*. [Zech 11.7]

The life of penitents is called a rod, and beauty. It is a rod because it is set under the rigour of discipline, beauty because it is cleansed by tears from all the leprosy of sin. The life of carnal people is called a cord, because they are bound in the cords of their sins.

How many evils are inflicted by Cain on Abel, by Esau on Jacob, by carnal folk on penitents, is shown by what follows: I and this woman dwelt in one house, etc. These are the two ships anchored in the lake. The lake and the house, in which the two women live, stand for the world. Penitents and carnal people both give birth; but on the third day penitents bring forth works of light, the heritage of eternal life, in bitterness of heart. Of

this birth, it is said: *A woman, when she is in labour, hath sorrow* [Jn 16.21]. Carnal people bring forth works of darkness, children of hell, in the pleasure of the flesh. Of them Solomon says in Proverbs*: They are glad when they have done evil, and rejoice in most wicked things* [Prov 2.14]. This, too, is 'on the third day': first they conceive in the consent of their mind, from the adulterous suggestions of the devil; then they carry, in the intention of an evil will; thirdly they give birth to sin in the effective action.

*And we were together, and no other person with us in the house, only we two*. They live together in the world; as Job says:

*I was the brother of dragons, and companion of ostriches.* [Job 30.29]

On the threshing floor, there is both grain and chaff; in the wine-press, there is both wine and pips, oil and dregs.

There follows: *And this woman's child died*, etc. The work of carnal folk perishes, choked by the guilt that follows it. In the night of evil intention, in blindness of mind, the child of this woman is slain. For in her sleep she overlaid him. *For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that are drunk, are drunk in the night* [cf. 1Thess 5.7].

*And rising in the dead time of the night*, etc. Dead, indeed, when nothing can be done, and all is still. The word suggests 'untimely', the deep dark midst of the night. St Gregory[1] explains this text as applying to worldly teachers, "who fail to practise what they preach, and so kill their hearers by bodily sleep, stifling them by their neglect, even while they seem to nourish them with the milk of their words. While they live disgracefully, they cannot have praiseworthy disciples, They try to attract others, so that while they appear to have good followers, they excuse their own bad actions before human judgement, and cover up their deadly neglect with the life of their subjects. The woman who killed her own child sought that of another; but Solomon's sword discovered the true mother, because at the last judgement the wrath of the judge will examine and show forth whose offspring lives, and whose is dead. But note that first the order is given to divide the living child, so that afterwards he may be returned to his mother alone. In this life, it is granted that the life of the disciple be as it were divided: having merit before God, on the one hand, and praise from men on the other. But the false mother, who has not given the child birth, does not scruple to kill it. Arrogant teachers, devoid of charity, if they cannot get the fullest respect and praise from other people's disciples, they cruelly seek their lives. Burning with envy, they will not let others live, if they cannot possess them themselves. *Let it be neither mine nor thine*. If they do not see them bowing to them, to their temporal honour, they begrudge them living for others in truth. The true mother strives to let her child live, even with another; and true teachers would rather other teachers got credit from their disciples, rather than that they should lose the integrity of their lives. The true mother is recognised by her loving heart, and teaching is proved entirely by the test of charity. Only she who was prepared to lose everything deserved to gain everything. Faithful leaders, because they do not begrudge the praise good disciples give to others, but even pray for their success, will themselves receive

back their children, alive and whole, when at the last judgement they receive perfect recompense for their lives."

So much for the two ships and their **concordances**. Let us move on.

**(A sermon on Peter's ship, and what its equipment signifies: *Be all of one mind*.)**

7. There follows: *The fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets*. Note that the fishermen were gone out of both ships, that of penitents and that of carnal people. Penitents go out from what they are by grace to what they are by nature, from the level of a more excellent life to the consideration of their own frailty. Carnal people go out from their swollen pride to the dust of penitence. They washed their nets. The Gloss says that someone folds up his washed nets when he leaves aside the duty of preaching, in order to try and fulfil what he has taught to others.

So, in the Introit of today's Mass, he prays:

*Hear my voice, O Lord, with which I have cried to thee:*

*Be thou my helper, forsake me not; do not thou despise me, O God my Saviour*. [Ps 26.7,9]

Note that Peter's ship, the life of penitents who are rightly turned towards their Spouse, prays for three things: to be heard, to be not forsaken, and to be not despised. To be heard in prayer, to be not forsaken when persecuted by enemies, to be not despised for sins committed.

The first part of today's Epistle is **concordant** with this first clause, wherein blessed Peter speaks to the children of the ship entrusted to him, saying:

*Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, being lovers of the brotherhood, merciful, modest, humble; not rendering evil for evil, nor railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing: for unto this are you called, that you may inherit a blessing*. [1Pt 3.8-9]

When Peter saw the ship entrusted to him tossed by the waves of the wild sea, exposed to wind and danger, he brought it, like a good captain, to a peaceful and calm harbour; and so with wonderful teaching made for it mast and sail, rudder and anchor, and oars on either side. He said: *Be ye all of one mind*; there is the mast in the midst of the ship, unity in faith and heart. They had but one heart and one soul [Ac 4.32]. Having compassion: that is the sail, for as a sail pulls along a ship, so compassion pulls you towards your neighbour's need. The Apostle says to the Corinthians*: If one member suffer any thing, all the members suffer with it* [1Cor 12.26]. Lovers of the brotherhood: that is the rudder. Just as the rudder steers the ship aright, and does not let it go off

course (and in that is the main ability to bring it to harbour), so fraternal charity guides the gathering of the faithful, so that it does not go astray, and brings it to safe harbour. Where there is charity and love, there is the gathering of the saints. Merciful: that is the anchor. The hooked and curved anchor grips with its hook, and being held fast, holds the ship fast. In the same way mercy, taking hold of our neighbour from the heart, is taken hold of by our neighbour, and both holds and is held, binds and is bound. Thus bound, the ship of the soul cannot be moved from its quiet stability, either by the waves of temptation or the blasts of evil suggestion. Modest, humble: those are the right-hand oars; not rendering evil for evil, but contrariwise, blessing: those are the left-hand oars.

If our ship is prepared and equipped with these eight, it will steer a right course to the blessing of the eternal inheritance, and reach the harbour of everlasting rest. May he grant this, who is blessed and glorious for ever and ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(An allegorical and a moral sermon on Solomon's navy, and both the allegorical and moral senses of the gold, silver, elephants' teeth, apes and peacocks: *King Solomon's navy*.)**

8. There follows, secondly:

*and going up into one of the ships that was Simon's, he desired him to draw back a little from the land. And sitting, he taught the multitude out of the ship. Now when he had ceased to speak, he said to Simon: Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.* [Lk 5.3-4]

There is a **concordance** to this in the third book of Kings, where it says:

*King Solomon's navy went by sea to Tharsis; and brought from thence gold, and silver, and elephants' teeth, and apes, and peacocks*. [3(1)Kg 10.22]

King Solomon's navy and Peter's ship have the same meaning. A ship needs a skilled captain who knows how to steer her through the perils and dangers of the sea. So Proverbs says:

*He that understandeth shall possess governments*. [Prov 1.5]

The ship is the Church of Jesus Christ, committed to Peter's care. It needs a skilled helmsman, not a fool, not a wrecker, to keep it safe among dangers. It is Solomon's navy, sailing across the sea of this world to Tharsis (meaning 'joy's discovery'), to those who find joy in this world and take pleasure in it. The gold is human wisdom, the silver is philosophers' eloquence; the elephants' teeth are mighty teachers, who chew the food of the word for little ones. The apes, who mimic human activity but live like beasts, are

those who come from heathenism to the faith, seeming to hold the faith yet denying it by their deeds. The peacocks, whose dried flesh is said to remain without decay, and who are clad in beautiful plumage, are the perfect: who are smoked in the fire of tribulation so as to be adorned with all kinds of virtue. These are all brought by the Church's preaching from Tharsis, from the salt waves of the world, to our Solomon, Jesus Christ.

9. Morally. Solomon's navy is the mind of the penitent, which goes through the sea of bitter contrition, to Tharsis: to discover what it has done or left undone, sin and all the circumstances of sin; where it comes from, where it is and where it is going, how frail this wretched flesh is, and how weak and unreliable is worldly prosperity. So Genesis tells how Joseph said to his brothers:

*You are spies. You are come to view the weaker parts of the land*. [Gen 42.9]

That is, every day they consider the frailty and weakness of their flesh, in bitterness of soul. They are Joshua's spies, to whom he said:

*Go and view the land, and the city of Jericho*. [Jos 2.1]

Jericho (meaning 'moon') stands for the changeable prosperity of the world. Just men who investigate it so as to attack it find in it nothing but bitterness and sorrow. From this exploration they carry back gold, silver, and so on. The gold is a purified conscience, the silver is the confession of praise. The elephants' teeth are self-accusation and self-reproof, the apes are the consideration of their own defilement, the peacocks are the casting away of past glory.

Of the first two, Job says:

*Silver hath beginnings of its veins: and gold hath a place wherein it is melted*. [Job 28.1]

The beginning of the veins is the human heart; therefore from the heart a man should dig out silver, the confession of divine praise. But Jeremiah says:

*O Lord, thou art near their mouth and far from their reins.* [Jer 12.2]

The heart of carnal folk is in their reins, their lusts; while God's praise is on their lips.

*This people honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.* [Mt 15.8]

The beginning of the veins, from which should flow silver, is far from God. How, then, can the sweet silver of praise sound in the Almighty's ear, he who says: *Son, give me thy heart* [Prov 23.26], and: *God looks at the heart* [cf. Ps 7.10]? And gold hath a place wherein it is melted. The glory of our conscience is purified in the smelting-oven of self-examination. This is the place for gold, not the human tongue wherein gold is destroyed

if it is smelted. Wretched is he who trusts more in another's tongue than in his own conscience: many fear a bad name, but few a bad conscience! The great thing is not to be praised, but to be praiseworthy!

**(Further on the nature and meaning of elephants and peacocks.)**

10. Regarding the teeth of self-accusation and self-reproof, Job says: *I tear my flesh with my teeth* [Job 13.14]. Someone 'tears their flesh with their teeth' when they rightly rebuke and accuse their own carnality. Penitent men are aptly represented by elephants, for these are said to be kindly animals. If they find a man lost in the desert, they show him the way to familiar paths. If they come across sheep caught in briars, they tread out a smooth and safe path for them. The oldest walks first in line, the next in age brings up the rear. When they are about to cross a river, they send the smallest in front, in case the bigger ones wear away the bank as they enter, and make deep eddies when they disturb the shallows. In the same way just men should be gentle, leading the lost back to the path, making a way for simple souls (the sheep) with the kindness and gentleness of their actions, so that they can travel unharmed. By example and advice they should lead others; and when crossing the river of this world to our homeland, they should let the little ones go first, showing compassion and mercy to beginners who have not yet been hardened in holiness, in case, being inexperienced in the austere way of the perfect, they fall away discouraged from the work they have started.

The apes represent the consideration of foul and filthy things that have been committed. Apes have no tails, with which to cover their shameful and dirty parts. True penitents, likewise, have no cause to excuse themselves, to cover up their sins. They uncover the shameful things they have done, nakedly and openly, blushing in God's sight alone, not that of men.

Peacocks represent the putting away of temporal glory. Take note: the peacock sheds its feathers when the first tree sheds its leaves. Afterwards, when the trees put forth new leaves, it gains new plumage. The 'first tree' stands for Jesus Christ, who was planted in the garden of delight, the womb of the blessed Virgin. The leaves of the tree are his words; and when the preacher drops them in preaching for the sinner to pick up, the latter sheds his own feathers, that is, his riches. In the general resurrection, when all the trees (the saints) begin to make new leaves, then he who has cast away the feathers of temporal things will receive the plumage of immortality. And just as there is beauty in the feathers of the peacock, and dirt on its feet (considering which, I would say, its beauty is lessened): so penitents cast away the glory of this world by remembering their lowly and earthy nature. This, then, is the merchandise that penitents carry back, when they do not fail to examine themselves and what belongs to them every day.

**(A sermon against prelates and priests of the Church: *He desired him to draw back a little*.)**

11. *And going up into one of the ships that was Simon's, he desired him to draw back a*

*little from the land*. The Lord asks the prelate of his Church to draw back a little from the land: to withdraw what is entrusted to his guidance from the love of earthly things. If he sticks to the land, hunched and bent to the earth, how can he withdraw others from the land? When Moses set off to Egypt with his wife and children (as Exodus tells), an angel tried to kill him. But when he left his wife and children, the angel let him go [cf. Ex 4.24-26]. So it is that the prelates and priests of our day (who are signified by Moses) literally have wives and children, who creep after the priests and shout 'Woe! Woe!' Isaiah says of them: *The ass-colts shall eat mingled provender* [Is 30.24]. The Hebrew word denotes a mixture of chopped straw mingled with corn. Our priests' income today consists of two things: the straw of earthly business and the corn of Church offerings. The ass-colts, the priests' children, eat this mixture. They want to free God's people from the devil's captivity, with a wife and children! The Lord will meet them and kill them, unless they separate from their wives and children. When they have done so, the Lord will say: 'Draw the ship back a little from the land.'

**(An allegorical sermon on Holy Church: *King Solomon made a throne*.)**

12. There follows: *And sitting, he taught the multitude out of the ship*. There is a **concordance** to this in the third book of Kings:

*King Solomon made a great throne of ivory: and overlaid it with the finest gold. It had six steps: and the top of the throne was round behind. And there were two hands on either side holding the seat: and two lions stood, one at each hand. And twelve little lions stood upon the six steps on the one side and on the other. There was no such work made in any kingdom*. [3(1)Kg 10.18-20]

This text can be explained in three ways: first about the Church, then about the soul, and thirdly about the blessed Virgin Mary.

About the Church: Solomon's throne means the Church, wherein our Prince of Peace reigns and pronounces his judgements. It is fitting said to be made of ivory, because the elephant (whose bone it is) is the most sagacious of animals, and is modest when he mates, and takes no second mate. This is a fitting image for those who follow Christ's precepts by chastity. He 'covers it with gold', making the splendour of his glory shine in it by his miracles. In six days God perfected the adornment of the world, and this number, by its perfection, signifies the perfection of his works. On the seventh, God rested. And because the world is made in six ages, wherein it is lawful to work, whoever wants to reach the heavenly home should hasten to go up by good works. The roundness of the throne behind represents eternal rest, which will come to the saints after this life. Whoever works well here will receive a reward and enjoy everlasting rest. The hands holding the seat represents the comfort of divine grace, which bears the Church towards the heavenly kingdom. There are two, because this is preached in both Testaments, and nothing good can be achieved without divine help. The two lions represent the patriarchs of the two Testaments, who by strength of soul learned to rule themselves and others. They stand beside the hands, because the holy fathers attributed the good they did not to themselves, but to God: Not to us, *O Lord, not to us: but to thy name give glory* [Ps

113B.1]. The twelve little lions stand for the preaching order, which follows the apostolic teaching. They stand on the six steps, on either side, because they strive to reinforce the performance of good works by their teaching and example.

**(A moral sermon on the faithful soul: *King Solomon made a throne*. It also speaks of the nature of elephants and their moral significance, and on the significance of the four elements.)**

13. *King Solomon made*, etc. To achieve any work, two things are necessary: wisdom and power. Wisdom makes ready, power performs. Jesus Christ, the power and wisdom of God [cf. 1Cor 1.24], made himself a throne to rest upon. This throne is the soul of any just person, whom Jesus Christ created by wisdom out of nothing, and recreated by power when she was lost. He made a throne to rest in, because the soul of the just is the seat of wisdom. He said, through Isaiah:

*To whom shall I have respect, but to the humble and quiet, and that trembleth at my words?* [Is 66.2]

And Ecclesiasticus says:

*The king, that sitteth on the throne, scattereth away all evil with his look*. [Prov 20.8]

In this way Jesus Christ, the King of kings, sits upon his throne, resting in the soul. He scatters all the evil of the world, the flesh and the devil by his look, the respect of his grace.

*He made a great throne of ivory*, etc. Let us see what is meant by the ivory, the fine gold, the six steps, the round top behind, the two hands and the seat, the two lions and the twelve little lions. Ivory comes from elephants, and it is said that there is an age-old conflict between elephants and dragons. The serpents set traps in this cunning way. They lurk near the paths by which the elephants roam about their customary pastures. When the first in line have gone by, they attack those behind so that the leaders cannot help them. First they knot themselves about their legs, so that thus entangled they cannot move. The elephants, however, rub themselves against trees or rocks, so as to kill the snakes by the heavy pressure. The main cause of this struggle is that the elephants' blood is cooler, and so they are caught by the fiercely burning stream from the dragons. For this reason the latter only attack those who have taken much drink, so that with more flowing in their veins, they may draw more abundantly from them as they squeeze them. And they attack the eyes above all, which are most vulnerable, and the inside of the ears.

The elephants are just men; the dragons are the demons, between whom and the just there is always conflict. The demons set traps for the feet of the just (their affections), and it is with these that the just kill the serpents themselves. They are slain from the very spot in which they tried to inject their poison. The burning lust of the demons tries to

destroy the chastity of the saints, and they attack most fiercely when they see them given to gluttony, which inflames the coolness of chastity. Above all, they aim at the eyes, which they know to be the first way in for lust. Alternatively: they first attack the eyes, reason and understanding which are the eyes of the soul, to pluck them out; and they would stop up their ears so that they could not hear the word of God. The words, a great ivory throne, are well-chosen; it is ‘ivory’ as regards chastity, ‘great’ as to heavenly contemplation.

*He overlaid it with the finest gold*. The vesture of the soul is faith, which is golden when lit up by the brightness of charity. Of this vesture the book of Wisdom says:

*In the priestly robe which Aaron wore was the whole world*. [Wisd 18.24]

The vesture of faith should, by the worker’s love, contain the four elements of which all the world is made: the fire of charity, the air of contemplation, the water of compunction and the earth of humility.

*It had six steps*: the abhorrence of sin, self-accusation, forgiveness of injuries received, compassion for one’s neighbour, despite of self and the world, and the achievement of final perseverance.

*And the top of the throne was round behind*. The top of the throne is the burning desire of the soul to see God; ‘behind’, that is, at the end of life, it will be ‘round’, passing from hope to vision. As the Psalm says: *The hinder parts of her back with the paleness of gold* [Ps 67.14]. The ‘hinder parts’ of the dove (that is, the soul) stand for eternal blessedness. They are ‘with the paleness of gold’, that is, with the contemplation of the divine majesty.

*And there were two hands on either side holding the seat*: this refers to the foot-stool, which was of gold. The seat is obedience, held by the two hands of the remembrance of the Lord’s Passion, and the recollection of one’s own sin. Beside these two hands two lions stand: hope and fear. Hope stands beside the remembrance of the Lord’s Passion, and obedience is freely given to this example, whereby we hope to have what we believe in. The lion of fear stands by the recollection of our sins, threatening the danger of eternal death if one does not obey.

*And twelve little lions stood upon the six steps on the one side and on the other*. The twelve little lions are those twelve virtues the Apostle enumerates, saying:

*The fruit of the Spirit is: charity, joy, peace, patience, longanimity, goodness, benignity, mildness, faith, modesty, chastity, continence*. [Gal 5.22-23]

The spirit of the just man, as it were the first little lion, contains all these.

**(A sermon on the blessed Virgin Mary: *King Solomon made*; and the seven steps**

**of the throne.)**

14. *King Solomon made*, etc. Blessed Mary is called the throne of the true Solomon; whence Ecclesiasticus says of her:

*I dwelt in the highest places, and my throne is in a pillar of cloud*. [Ecclus 24.7]

That is as if to say: I, who dwell in the highest with the Father, have chosen a throne in a poor little mother. Note that the blessed Virgin, the throne of the Son of God, is called a pillar of cloud; a pillar, because she supports our frailty; of cloud; of cloud, because she is immune from sin. This throne was ‘of ivory’, because blessed Mary was white in virtue of her innocence, and cold, without the heat of lust.

In her were six steps, as is noted in the Gospel: *The angel Gabriel was sent* [Lk 1.26-38]. The first was modesty: *She was troubled at his saying*. It is said that ‘Modesty is to be commended in a child, cheerfulness in a youth, and prudence in an old man.’ Secondly, prudence: she did not say yes or no immediately, she began by thinking: She thought with herself *what manner of salutation this should be*. Thirdly, modesty: *How shall this be done?* Fourthly, constancy in her good intention: *Because I know not man*. Fifthly, humility: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord*. Sixthly, obedience: *Be it done to me.*

This throne was overlaid with the gold of poverty. O golden poverty of the glorious Virgin, which wrapped around the Son of God and laid him in the manger! We may well think of poverty as a robe, which clothes the soul in virtue, yet strips it of wealth.

*And the top of the throne was round behind*. The ‘top’ of blessed Mary was charity, in virtue of which she holds the highest place hereafter, in eternal bliss, without beginning or end.

*And there were two hands on either side holding the seat*. The ‘seat’, the golden foot-stool, was the humility of blessed Mary, held by the two hands of the active and the contemplative life. She was like Martha and Mary. She was Martha as she went into Egypt and returned; she was Mary when she *kept all these words, pondering them in her heart* [Lk 2.19].

*And two lions stood*, Gabriel and John the Evangelist, or else Joseph and John, on either side of the hands: Joseph on the active side, John on the contemplative.

*And twelve little lions*, the twelve Apostles, venerating her and obeying her on either side. Truly, truly, such a work was never made in all kingdoms, for "Nothing like was ever seen, nor will it be again"[2] Many daughters have gathered together riches; the blessed Virgin Mary has surpassed them all [cf. Prov 31.29]. So someone has said: "If the Virgin alone were to be silent, no-one else’s voice would be heard."

**(A sermon against priests: *Hear*.)**

15. There follows: *Now when he had ceased to speak, he said to Simon: Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught*. ‘Deep’ may apply to what is above and what is below. We call the heavens ‘deep’, we call the sea ‘deep’. He says to Simon Peter (that is, to any bishop): Launch out into the deep; and he says to his assistants, immediately afterwards, Let down your nets for a draught. Unless the ship of the Church is steered into the deep waters of holiness by its commander, the priests will not let down the nets to catch anything, but will ‘turn aside victims into the depth’.

So Hosea says:

*Hear ye this, O priests... for there is a judgement against you, because you have been a snare to them whom you should have watched over, and a net spread upon Thabor. And you have turned aside victims into the depth*. [Hos 5.1-2]

Note these three: ‘snare’, ‘net’ and ‘turned aside’. They represent three vices of priests, namely negligence, avarice, and gluttony and lust.

Negligence: *you have been a snare to them whom you should have watched over*. Priests are appointed to keep watch, but by their negligence those they watch over fall into the devil’s snare.

Avarice: *and a net spread upon Thabor*. The Lord was transfigured upon mount Thabor. The name means ‘coming light’, and it represents the altar upon which occurs the transfiguration, or transubstantiation of the forms of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. By this sacrament, light comes into the souls of the faithful. On this mount Thabor priests ( I would rather call them ‘traders’) spread the net of their avarice in order to amass money. They celebrate Masses for fees, and if they do not think they will get any, they will not celebrate Mass at all. They make the sacrament of salvation an instrument of greed.

Gluttony and lust: *And you have turned aside victims into the depth*. The ‘victims’ are the offerings of the faithful, which they divert from their proper object to gluttony and lust. A ‘victim’ originally meant what was slain in sacrifice. The offerings of the faithful, whom they scorn, go to fatten their flocks and herds, their ‘housekeepers’ and their children. It was commanded in the Law that: *A mamzer*, that is to say, one born of a prostitute*, shall not enter into the house of the Lord* [Dt 23.2]. Behold, the sons of whores not only enter the Lord’s house, but consume its goods!

16. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause:

*He that will love life and see good days*, etc. [1Pt 3.10]

Blessed Peter took this text from the psalm of David [Ps 33.13-17], which contains three things, the eternal glory of the just, the life of penitents, and the punishment of evil-doers:

eternal glory, when he says: *He that will love life*;

the life of penitents, in: *Let him refrain his tongue*;

the punishment of evil-doers, by adding: *The countenance of the Lord is upon them that do evil things*.

True penitence consists in these six things: to refrain the tongue from evil, since, "I reckon that the first virtue is to hold one's tongue; total silence mends evil speech."[3] to speak no guile: *Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle?* Assuredly, *He that hath not used deceit in his tongue* [Ps 14.1,3]. to decline from evil: this is not enough, unless he adds, to do good; to seek after peace, inwardly: that is, to look for it in yourself; if you find it, you will undoubtedly have peace with God and your neighbour, and pursue it: with final perseverance.

The merciful eyes of the Lord are on those who do these things, and his kindly ears hear their prayers. The punishment of evil-doers is expressed by, The countenance of the Lord (meaning, his frown) is upon them that do evil things. These three things (glory, penitence and punishment) are what Jesus Christ preached to the crowds when he entered the ship, and his Vicar does not cease from preaching them every day.

Dearest brothers, let us pray the Lord Jesus Christ himself to make us go up into Simon's ship by obedience; to sit in the ivory throne of humility and chastity; to steer our ship away from earthly things towards the deep of contemplation; and to let down our nets for a catch: so that with a multitude of good works we may attain to him, who is the good and supreme God. May he be pleased to grant us this, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the contempt of temporal things, which are nothing*: I looked at the earth*.)**

17. There follows, thirdly:

*And Simon, answering, said to him: Master, we have laboured all the night, and have taken nothing, but at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had done this, they enclosed a very great multitude of fishes, and their net broke. And they beckoned to their partners that were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they were almost sinking.* [Lk 5.5-7]

Night obscures the eyes, so that they cannot see. Those who work at night catch nothing; sometimes they are caught themselves. So the psalm says:

*Thou hast appointed darkness, and it is night:*

*in it shall all the beasts of the wood go about*. [Ps 103.20]

When night (the darkness of sin) falls upon the soul, the beasts (who are the demons) go about to tear it in pieces. He who works in the night, the darkness of this life, to find some transitory gain, gains nothing at all. These temporal things are nothing.

Jeremiah says*: I beheld the earth, and lo it was void and nothing* [Jer 4.23]. Nothing is 'no thing'. Nothing follows from a man who embraces this empty world. 'Nothing' is just a word, not a 'thing', and yet of old some took it for a kind of entity, 'nothingness'. Isaiah says of it:

*All nations are before him as if they had no being at all,*

*and are counted to him as nothing and vanity*. [Is 40.17]

All the heathen nations- that is, those who live like heathens- are as if they had no being before God. They exist by nature, but not by grace; for to be evil is scarcely to 'be' at all. Whoever falls away from true being, may be counted as nothing and vanity. 'To be', truly and properly speaking, applies to what does not grow more or less, or change in any way. 'Being' has no contrary except 'non-being'. Whoever grows in respect of temporal things, is diminished by his lack of charity. He is changed and altered by his unstable mind. He falls away from true being, and is counted as nothing and vanity.

There follows: *but at thy word I will let down the net*. The Gloss says, 'Unless the instruments of preaching are let down in words of heavenly grace (inner inspiration), in vain the preacher casts the javelin of his voice. The people's faith is not aroused by clever and well-chosen words, but by the strength of divine calling. How vain is presumption! How fruitful is humility! Those who took nothing previously, enclose a great multitude at the word of Christ. The net is broken from the great number of fishes, because at the moment so many sinners enter with the elect, that they tear the Church apart with heresies. The net is broken, but not a fish is lost, because the Lord keeps his own even amid the scandal of persecution.' *At thy word*, not mine, *I will let down the net*. Every time I have done this of my own accord, I have caught nothing, Alas! As often as I have done it of my own accord, I have given the credit to myself, not to you. I have preached myself, not you; my words, not yours. That is why I have caught nothing; or if I caught anything, it was not a fish but a croaking frog that praised me- and this praise was nothing at all! But *at thy word I will let down the net*. He lets down the net at the word of Jesus Christ, who gives no credit to himself, but all to Christ; and who lives according to what he preaches. If he does that, he will catch a great multitude of fishes.

**(A sermon on how we should attribute nothing to ourselves, but everything to God, so that we may be able to catch the great multitude of fish: *Elias went up to the top of Carmel*.)**

18. There is a **concordance** to this in the third book of Kings, where it says that:

*Elias went up to the top of Carmel, and casting himself down upon the earth put his face between his knees. And he said to his servant: Go up, and look towards the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said: There is nothing. And again he said to him: Return seven times. And at the seventh time, behold, a little cloud arose out of the sea like a man's foot... And, behold, the heavens grew dark, with clouds and wind; and there fell a great rain*. [3(1)Kg 18.42-45]

Let us see what is meant by Elias, the top of Carmel, cast down, the earth, the face between the knees, the servant, the seven times, the little cloud and the man's foot, the sea, the cloud, the wind and the rain.

Elias is the preacher, who should go to the top of Carmel ('knowledge of circumcision'), meaning the excellence of a holy way of life, in which a man knows very well that he should cut away all unnecessary things. He should be cast down in humility upon the earth, remembering his own weakness. He should put his face between his knees, by afflicting himself for his past sins. He should tell his servant to go up, and look towards the sea. The servant, a mere lad, stands for the preacher's body, which he should keep in child-like purity. This servant should look towards the sea, towards worldlings who are infected with the bitterness of sin. He 'looks towards' them when in his preaching he sets forth the opposite of their vices. He should look seven times, setting forth the seven articles of faith: the Incarnation, Baptism, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, his sending of the Holy Spirit, and his coming in the Judgement. Therein the sinners who have been judged will be cast into the lake of burning fire, where *there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth* [cf. Mt 13.42; Apoc 21.8]. In this seventh article, as if at the seventh time, worldly people will be struck by the fear of punishment, and the preacher will see a little cloud, a little bit of compunction, arise from the sea of their hearts. It will be like the foot-step of a man, meaning the grace of Jesus Christ. When this takes root in the sinner's heart, assuredly the little cloud of compunction arises and grows, little by little, until it is a great cloud overshadowing temporal things. Then follows the mighty wind of confession, which uproots all vices, and the great rain of satisfaction which inebriates the earth and makes it fruitful. And in this way the preacher takes a great multitude of fishes.

There follows: *And they beckoned to their partners that were in the other ship*, etc. We said above that these two ships signify two ways of life, of penitents and of carnal folk. Those who are in Peter's ship, by obedience and penitence, call those who are in a carnal life to come and help them. There is something similar in the third book of Kings, where Solomon sent to Hiram, king of Tyre, to give him help in building the Lord's temple [cf. 3(1)Kg 5.1-6]. So they call carnal people by their preaching, to come away from worldly vanity and help them by giving themselves to works of penance. In this way both

ships are filled, and the Lord's temple is built of living stones, drawn from both groups, a temple built in the heavenly Jerusalem.

19. The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** with this third clause:

*And who is he that can hurt you, if you be zealous of good? But if also you suffer any thing for justice's sake, blessed are ye. And be not afraid of their fear, and be not troubled*. [1Pt 3.13-14]

Peter speaks to penitents, drawn out of the world's sea by the net of preaching. He says, if you follow and imitate good people, who have called you to penitence, who can hurt you? No-one, surely? Neither man nor the devil. If you suffer for justice, not for some fault, you are blessed and rewarded, because you will receive a crown. Do not be afraid of their fear: fear is of two kinds, fear about things and fear about our own bodies. Those who love God despise both. Do not be troubled or moved from your own firmness of mind. He does not speak of a mere outward disturbance, which the body sometimes experiences. He speaks of something deeper: the inner mind should remain fixed and firm.

Beloved brothers, let us ask the Word of God the Father that (at his word and not our own) we may let down the nets of our preaching, so as to be able to pull sinners out from the depths of their sins, and rise with them to him. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[FOURTH CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the two breasts of Jesus Christ, his Incarnation and his Passion: *You shall be carried at the breasts*.)**

20. There follows, fourthly:

*Which when Simon Peter saw, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying: Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was wholly astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of fishes which they had taken. And so were also James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's partners. And Jesus saith to Simon: Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And having brought their ships to land, leaving all things, they followed him.* [Lk 5.8-11]

Peter, knowing himself to be a sinner, was afraid of offending the presence of so great a majesty, and that is why he said: *Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord*. Because he knew he was a sinner, he threw himself at Jesus' knees. There are two things to note here: fear for sin, expressed in He fell down; and hope in the Redeemer's mercy, expressed by at Jesus' knees. The Lord promised such sinners, by Isaiah:

*You shall be carried at the breasts, and upon the knees they shall caress you*. [Is 66.12]

The breasts, flowing with milk, are two in number. They refer to the Incarnation and the Passion. The first brings comfort, the second reconciliation. Newly converted penitents are like sucking babes, carried at the breasts, so as to be comforted with the milk of the Incarnation, and given life and reconciliation by the blood which flowed from his breast when it was pierced by the lance on mount Calvary, so that they may bear suffering. They are caressed upon the knees of the Father's kindness, as a mother caresses her child, so that they may trust most surely that he will not deny remission of sins and the bliss of the kingdom to those he has given the breasts of the Incarnation and the Passion.

He said, then: *Depart from me, Lord*, etc. Given so great a benefit, where nowadays is the man who fears to offend? Peter was afraid; but we, conscious of so many crimes, approach without reverence the presence of the divine majesty, and are not afraid. The presence of the divine majesty is where the Body of Christ, glory of the angels, is; where the Church's sacraments are; where the holy Mysteries are handled. We believe in these things, but, obstinate in our ill-will, we do not stop sinning. That is why the Lord says through Jeremiah:

*What is the meaning that my beloved hath wrought much wickedness in my house?*

*Shall the holy flesh take away from thee thy crimes in which thou hast boasted?* [Jer 11.15]

Certainly not- rather it will increase them.

*He was wholly astonished*. Peter and his companions were astonished at so great a catch of fish. We, too, should be astonished at the conversion of sinners, like those spoken of in the book of Judges, because

*Samson made a great slaughter of the Philistines, so that in astonishment they laid the calf of the leg upon the thigh*. [Jg 15.8]

The calf is the back of the lower leg. When the Lord strikes the Philistines (the demons) and frees Israel (the soul) from their hands, we should be astonished and 'lay the calf upon the thigh'. The thigh stands for fleshly pleasure, and we should 'lay the calf upon it' by following the example of converted sinners and repressing bodily pleasure with bodily penance.

There follows: *Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men*. 'From henceforth' refers to Peter in particular, when the meaning of the catch of fish was explained to him. Just as he once caught fish with a net, so now he would catch men with his words. Alternatively, 'From henceforward' means, from being humble and ashamed of the blemishes of your life, yet not too ashamed to confess them, but rather seeking a remedy for your open wound: from this you will catch men.

*And having brought their ships to land, leaving all things, they followed him*. Christ,

"A giant in two-fold substance one, / rejoicing now his course to run,"[4]

*rejoiced to run the way* [Ps 18.6], and to complete the task for which he had come. Whoever wants to follow him must forsake everything, casting everything aside and leaving it behind. "A burdened man cannot follow a running man." So it says in the third book of Kings:

*The hand of the Lord was upon Elias: and he girded up his loins and ran*. [3(1)Kg 18.46]

The ‘hand of God’ means his help, his grace. When it is upon a man, it gives him such great help that, as it were with loins girded, he runs in chastity; and by poverty, he "naked follows the naked Christ, poor follows the poor Christ."

**(A sermon on the four things that are in the earth, and their meaning: *Sanctify the Lord Christ in your hearts*.)**

21. So the fourth part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this fourth clause of the Gospel:

*But sanctify the Lord Christ in your hearts*. [1Pt 3.15]

Note these three things: ‘Lord’, ‘Christ’ and ‘sanctify’. He is Lord because he commands; he is Christ because he is anointed; and he is sanctified or ‘holy’ from the Greek ‘*hagios’*, like ‘*a-gaia*’, ‘without earth’. Earth has four characteristics: it is unclean, it is unsatisfiable, it is opaque and it crumbles away. Someone who is ‘without earth’, the love of earthly things, is free from the uncleanness of lust, from insatiable avarice, from the blindness of wrath and envy, and from unreliability and inconstancy: such a person assuredly will sanctify Christ in his heart, like a humble servant and a true Christian.

Beloved brothers, let us pour out our prayers to Jesus Christ himself: that he will give us the ability to leave everything and run with the Apostles; and to sanctify him in our hearts, that we may thereby be able to attain to him who is the Holy of holies. May he grant this, who is to be praised and loved, who is gentle and kind, to whom be honour and glory for ever and ever. Let every penitent soul, drawn from the lake of Genesareth, say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on 3(1)Kg 3.17

[2] *BREVIARIUM ROMANUM*, Christmas Day, second antiphon at Lauds

[3] CATO, *Disticha*, I.2

[4] cf. *BREVIARIUM ROMANUM*, Advent Hymn, *Veni redemptor gentium*

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the sixth Sunday after Pentecost: *Unless your justice abound*; which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon for the prelates and preachers of the Church, and how they ought to live: *On the bases of the temple were carved*.)**

1. At that time: Jesus said to his disciples: *Unless your justice abound more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*. [Mt 5.20]

It says in the third book of Kings that on the bases of the temple were engraved cherubims, lions, oxen and bridles hanging down [cf. 3(1)Kg 7.27-29]. Note that three things come together to support the fabric of a house: capitals, columns and bases. The capitals, as it were the heads of the columns, stand for the prophets. As the third book of Kings says:

*The capitals that were on the top of the pillars were of lily-work*. [3(1)Kg 7.19]

The lilies represent the heavenly brightness of our eternal home, and the beauty of the undying paradise, sweet-scented as flowers. The prophets, forebears of the Apostles, set this forth for us in their writings.

The pillars are the Apostles themselves, as is said: *I have established the pillars thereof* [Ps 74.4]. In the third book of Kings it says that Solomon set up two pillars, one called Jachin ('firmness') and the other Booz ('strength'). These columns stand for the Apostles, who are rightly called two columns, because they twice received the Holy Spirit after the Resurrection: first on earth, so as to love their neighbour, and secondly from heaven, so as to love God. They received firmness in the Resurrection of Christ, and unfailing strength in the sending of the Holy Spirit.

The bases are the prelates and preachers of our own time, upon whom should be engraved four things: cherubim, lions, oxen and bridles. The cherubim stand for the fulness of knowledge and doctrine, the lions for the terror of power, the oxen for the meekness of mercy, and the bridles for the bonds of discipline. I pray you: let these things be engraved upon the bases of the temple: the knowledge of doctrine, so that

they may teach; the terror of power, so that they may correct; the meekness of mercy, so that they may encourage; and the bond of discipline, so that they may restrain. These four are spoken of in the fourth book of Kings, where Elisha cried out:

*My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the driver thereof*. [4(2)Kg 2.12]

My father, who teaches; my father, who corrects; the chariot that carries; and the driver who steers. If the Church's prelates and preachers have these four engraved upon them, they will truly have that abundant justice of which the Lord speaks in today's Gospel: *Unless your justice abound*, etc.

2. There are three things to note in this Gospel. First, the justice of the Apostles, when it begins: *Unless your justice abound*. Second, the condemnation of the one angry with his brother, and censuring him, by continuing*: You have heard that it was said to them of old*. Third, the reconciliation of brother to brother, by ending: *If therefore thou offer thy gift*. We will **concord** with these thre clauses some stories from the third book of Kings.

In the Introit of this Sunday's Mass we sing: *The Lord is the strength of his people*. The Epistle of blessed Paul to the Romans is read: *All we who are baptized*, etc. which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the three clauses of the Gospel. The first part is: *All we who are baptized*; the second is: *Knowing this, that our old man*; and the third is: *Knowing that Christ rising again from the dead.*

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the justice of hypocrites and of true penitents: *Unless your justice abound*; and: *Choose you one bullock*.)**

3. Let us say, then:

*Unless your justice abound more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*. [Mt 5.20]

The justice of the Pharisees a matter of restraining hand rather than heart. The Jews did not think sin was in the intention, but in the action alone. The justice of the Apostles abounds in the spirit of counsel and in the grace of God's mercy, so that it not only holds back the hand from evil action, but also the mind from evil thoughts. The scribes and Pharisees (the word means 'separated') are hypocrites who, when writing in human sight, write injustice; yet being ultra-religious*, regard themselves as just and look down on other people* [cf. Lk 18.9]. Their justice consists in washing hands and utensils, in wearing the right garments, in architectural niceties, in a multiplicity of rules and a variety of regulations. The justice of true penitents consists in spiritual poverty, in fraternal love,

in sighs of sorrow, in afflicting the body, in the sweetness of contemplation, in despising worldly success, in willingly embracing adversity, and in the intention of persevering to the end.

Regarding these two kinds of justice, there is a **concordance** in the third book of Kings, where it says that:

*Elias said to the prophets of Baal: Choose you one bullock, and dress it first, because you are many: and call on the names of your gods, but put no fire under... And they called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying: O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered: and they leaped over the altar they had made. And when it was now noon, Elias jested at them, saying: Cry with a louder voice; for he is your lord, and perhaps he is talking, or is in an inn, or on a journey; or perhaps he is asleep, and must be awaked. So they cried with a loud voice, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till they were all covered with blood*. [3(1)Kg 18.25-28]

This is what the Pharisees' justice is like. The justice of true penitents is as is shown in what follows:

*Elias built with the stones an altar to the name of the Lord: and he made a trench for water, of the breadth of two furrows round about the altar. And he laid the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces*.

He ordered that water be poured upon the sacrifice once, twice and three times.

*And the water ran about the altar: and the trench was filled with water*.

And when he had finished his prayer:

*The fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the holocaust, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw this, they fell on their faces. And they said: The Lord he is God*. [3(1)Kg 18.32-33,35,38-39]

**(Against the proud religious: *If the ox push with his horn*.)**

4. Those superstitious hypocrites, the prophets of Baal (which means 'master' or 'devourer'), chose their own bullock, carnal appetite. This is the ox that pushes with his horn, of which Exodus says:

*If the ox was wont to push with his horn yesterday and the day before, and they warned his master, and he did not shut him up, and he shall kill a man or a woman: then the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death*. [Ex 21.29]

The ox that pushes with his horn is the carnal appetite, which with the horn of pride kills a man or a woman: that is to say, his reason or his good will. Because his owner, the spirit, does not shut him up, he is killed along with the ox: body and soul will be eternally punished together. Hear this, you abbots and priors! If you have an ox that pushes with his horn, a monk or canon who is proud, a lover of wine and pleasure, and you will not shut him up, so that men and women are not scandalized by his bad example: the ox shall be stoned to death, and die in his sin, and the abbot or prior who would not restrain him will be punished eternally.

There follows*: And call on the names of your gods*, etc. They call on, and worship, as many gods as they have mortal sins. It says in Exodus:

*These are thy gods, O Israel, that have brought thee out of the land of Egypt*. [Ex 32.4]

Alas! How many religious there are today, who still worship, in the desert of religion and the cloister, the same gods that they worshipped in Egypt, the world! Because they lack the fire of charity, their sacrifice is useless to them. From morning until noon the cry out: Baal, hear us! What is 'crying to Baal' if not desiring to be a superior? But there is no voice, no-one who answers their will. So they cry again, still louder. To cry is to desire. They cut themselves with knives and lancets, with fasts and disciplines. They disfigure their faces, fasting early in the day, so that later on they can celebrate the festival of the belly! In Elijah's day, the prophets of Baal cried and were not heard. Nowadays, they cry and are heard! They are promoted to higher office, so that their fall is more ruinous. First they displayed a humble voice, a rough habit, a thin belly, a pale face, and assiduous prayer. Now they utter threats, and go coped and robed. They walk with ample stomach and ruddy face. They are assiduous in sleeping: but prayer- not at all! Come, Elijah, come! *Take the prophets of Baal and slay them at the brook Cison* [cf. 3(1)Kg 18.40]. Come, Solomon, and slay Adonias who wanted to be king [cf. 3(1)Kg 2.24], Semei, who cursed David [cf. 3(1)Kg 2.44-46], and Joab, who killed two princes of Israel, better than himself [cf. 3(1)Kg 2.31-32].

**(On the justice of penitents: *Elias built an altar*.)**

5. Regarding the justice of penitents, there follows: *Elias built an altar*, etc. Elijah is the penitent who rebuilds the altar of the Lord, destroyed by sin, with the stones of virtue. On it he offers the sacrifice of praise in an odour of sweetness. He made a trench, etc. from a contrite heart and a humbled spirit, and sheds streams of tears, from fear of hell and desire for eternal life. He lays the wood in order by taking the words and deeds of the saints as examples for himself. He divides the bullock in pieces and puts it on the wood, by striving to shape all his actions according to the examples of the holy fathers. He pours water once, twice and three times upon the holocaust and the wood, by keeping his thoughts, words and deeds always in purity of conscience and compunction of tears. And he does not stop until the trench is full of water, that is, until the joy to come, which will follow present sadness, is perfectly fulfilled. Then it will be as is written: *Fire fell from heaven and consumed the holocaust*, etc. Then the judgement of the heavenly Judge,

which examines our words and deeds and our whole life perfectly, testing us as fire tests silver, will make us immortal and blessed, and will enthrone us for ever. Then, like the Israelites, we will sing for ever in thanksgiving: *The Lord, he is God!*

Such is the justice that justifies penitents, and of which the Lord says: *Unless your justice abound*, etc. 'Justice is that by which, by a right judgement, everyone gets what he deserves.' This is a legal principle. A man is bound to show justice in five ways: by honouring God, by taking proper care of himself, by loving his neighbour, by despising the world, and by hating sin. These five correspond to what is said in the Introit of today's Mass:

*The Lord is the strength of his people: and the protector of the salvation of his anointed.*

*Save, O Lord, thy people, and bless thy inheritance: and rule them for ever*. [Ps 27.8-9]

If you show honour to God, God will be your strength. If, as far as you can, you take proper care of yourself, he will be the protector of your salvation. If you love your neighbour, he will save both you and him. If you despise the world, he will bless you, who are his inheritance. If you hate sin, he will rule you, and you will live with him for ever and ever.

**(On the Passion of Christ: *Whoever is baptized*.)**

6. The first part of today's Epistle is **concordant** with this first clause of the Gospel:

*All we who are baptized in Christ Jesus, are baptized in his death. For we are all buried together with him by baptism into death; that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection.* [Rom 6.3-5]

Here are the five parts of justice. Note that from the side of Christ there flowed blood and water: the water of Baptism and the blood of redemption. Water is for the sake of the body, *for the many waters are many peoples* [cf. Apoc 17.15]. Blood is for the soul, because *the life is in the blood* [cf. Dt 12.23]. We should give the whole to God, because he redeemed it all so as to possess it all.

All we who are baptized in Christ Jesus, that is, in the faith of Jesus Christ, are cleansed in his death, that is, in his blood. So the Apocalypse says:

*Who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood.* [Apoc 1.5]

Note that blood taken from a dove's side will wash a spot of blood out of the eye. Therefore, whatever our condition and ability, we should show honour and reverence to

him who has cleansed the spot of blood (sin) from the eye of our soul, with his own blood. Jesus Christ our Dove, without gall, and uttering sighs and tears as his song, was willing to open his side so as to cleanse the spot of blood from blind men, and open the gates of paradise to those exiled.

We should also take proper care of ourselves; and so there follows: *We are all buried together with him by baptism into death*, that is to say, the mortification of our vices. Just as Christ bore the agony of the Cross with limbs stretched out and nailed, and as he rested in the tomb and was hidden from human sight: so we should bear the cross of penitence, having our limbs restrained by continence, so that we do not go back to our former ways, from which we should rest so perfectly that we have neither sight nor memory of them.

And we should show love for our neighbour. So there follows: *that as Christ is risen*, etc. Just as Christ rose from the dead, appeared to his disciples, and turned their sadness into joy: so we should rise from dead works to the glory of the Father, and rejoice with our neighbours, and walk with them in newness of life. What else is newness of life, if not love for our neighbour? He said:

*A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another*. [Jn 13.34]

And Leviticus: *The new coming on, you shall cast away the old* [Lev 26.10]; namely, anger, envy, and the other things the Apostle lists.

**(On contempt for the world and flight into the desert: *Flee away, O my beloved*.)**

7. Likewise, we should despise the world and hate sin. So: If we have been planted together, etc. If we are transplanted from the Babylonian orchard, in which the false judges found Susanna, to the garden of the Bridegroom wherein he was buried, then we shall truly despise the world. And because hatred of sin is born of despising the world, the Apostle adds: in the likeness of his death. Where there is the likeness of Christ's death, there is abhorrence of sin. So it says in Canticles:

*Flee away, O my beloved, and be like to the roe,*

*and to the young hart upon the mountains of aromatical spices*. [Cant 8.14]

Flee away, my beloved, expresses hatred for the world. As John says, *when they wanted to take Jesus and make him king, he fled onto the mountain* [cf. Jn 6.15]; but *when they sought him to kill him, he went to meet them* [cf. Jn 18.4]. It says in Exodus that:

*Pharao sought to kill Moses. But he fled from his sight, and abode in the land of Madian: and he sat down beside a well*. [Ex 2.15]

You too should flee, my beloved; because the devil wants to kill you. Go and live in the land of Madian (which means 'of judgement'), so that you may judge your own land, and not be judged by God. Sit by the well of humility, from which *you may draw water springing to eternal life* [cf. Jn 4.14]. *Flee away, my beloved*. It says in Genesis that Rachel said to Jacob:

*Behold, Esau thy brother threateneth to kill thee. Now therefore, my son, hear my voice: Arise and flee to Laban, my brother, to Haran; and thou shalt dwell with him.*[Gen 27.42-44]

Hairy Esau is the world, full of many vices. He threatens to kill you, my son. Flee away, then, my beloved, to Laban (meaning 'whitening'), Jesus Christ who will make you whiter than snow [Ps 50.9] from your sins. He is in Haran ('on high'), and there you will live with him; because *God dwells on high* [Ps 112.3]. *Flee away, then, my beloved!*

*Be like to the roe and to the young hart*. The roe seeks hard places, and has keen sight as it aims for the heights. The young hart, offspring of deer, is hidden by its mother. These two represent Jesus Christ, God and man. The roe is his divinity, which sees all things; the hart is his humanity, hidden by his mother, delaying the business he began at twelve years of age until he was thirty*, going down with her to Nazareth and being subject to her* [cf. Lk 2.51]. This young hart is the offspring of deer, the ancient fathers from whose flesh he took his origin. Be like this roe, then, my beloved, be like this hart: that being planted together in likeness of his death, you may go up upon the mountains of spices. This is what the Apostle says: Also of his resurrection. The mountains of spices are the excellent virtues which whoever has, will rejoice with Christ in the general resurrection.

We ask you, then, Lord Jesus, to make us abound in works of justice; that we may despise the world, bear in us the likeness of your death, ascend the mountains of spices and rejoice with you in the joy of the Resurrection. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A sermon against the wrathful: *Adonias the son of Haggith*. The nature and meaning of the basilisk.)**

8. There follows, secondly:

*You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not kill. And whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgement. But I say to you, that whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgement. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the Council. And whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire*. [Mt 5.21-22]

The commandment of Christ is not contrary to the Law, but it contains a broader law. He who is not angry will not kill, but the contrary is not true. The freedom to be angry leads to murder: take away anger, and there will be no murder. ‘Anger’ includes every evil movement towards harm. A spontaneous movement, which is not consented to, is only the beginning of passion; but when consent is given, there is full passion, and death in the household.

*Whosoever is angry with his brother*, etc. There are degrees in these sins. The first is to be angry, but to hold it in the mind. It is worse, if this or that emotion leads to utterance, hurtful to the one with whom we are angry. It is worse still if one cries out with real cursing. There is a similar gradation in the punishment. ‘Judgement’ is a lesser thing, because even though it deals with a guilty person, there is room for defense. ‘The Council’ is a more serious matter: the judges confer together about the penalty to be inflicted, having agreed that sentence must be passed. ‘Hell’ is worse still, because there is no remission of sentence. In this way, things which cannot be expressed in precise and distinct terms can be distinguished by these analogies. In these three expressions- judgement, the Council, hell- different kinds of eternal punishment are referred to, each according to the type of sin.

Note that there is this difference between anger and irascibility: anger is an occurrence, arising from some cause; irascibility is a vice of nature, that persists. The irascible man is one who, by his hot blood, is roused to fury: ‘fury’ and ‘fiery’ are similar sounding words. The Hebrew word ‘*Raca*’ simply means ‘empty’ or ‘inane’, and we use it just as vulgar abuse, without thinking. Nevertheless, if you say this of your brother, who is full of the Holy Spirit, you become liable to punishment in the judgement of the holy judges. A ‘fool’ is one who does not understand what either he himself or others say: he is dull of heart.

9. There is a **concordance** to these three in the third book of Kings, where it tells how Solomon killed Adonias, Semei and Joab.

*Adonias the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying: I will be king. And he made himself achariot, and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him*. [3(1)Kg 1.5]

Adonias (meaning ‘The Lord is master’) is the iracible man, who wants to dominate others as their master. He is ‘son of Haggith’ (‘meditation’), because a twisted anger comes from brooding, and it incites the sinner to say ‘I will be king’. What great stupidity! Not yet able to control himself, and wanting to rule other people!

*He made himself a chariot*, etc. The chariot is the tongue, the horsemen are words, and the fifty men are the five bodily senses. The sinner’s mind is borne along in the cursed chariot of a loose tongue, vulnerable to sword and fire, as he burns with anger. His words run hither and thither, like charging horsemen. The five bodily senses obey, too, infected with the poison of wrath. The eyes are darkened, the ears deafened, the hands become cruel, and so with the rest. Here is that murderer, Zamri, of whom the third book of Kings tells:

*He went into the palace and burnt himself with the king's house; and he died in his sins, which he had sinned in doing evil before the Lord*. [3(1)Kg 16.18-19]

Zamri means one who provokes, or embitters, and he stands for the wrathful man who sets the fire of wrath to himself and the king's house- his soul, bought with the king's blood. So, sinning mortally, he dies in the sight of the Lord. The wrathful man is rightly represented by the basilisk.

The basilisk is a snake half-footed along its length, particularly deadly on earth, which destroys the grass with its breath, kills trees, slays and burns animals and everything else. It even pollutes the atmosphere, so that no bird can fly through the air infected by its poisonous breath. Even snakes are terrified by its hissing, and when they take to flight, they go as fast as they can. No beast will eat anything killed by its bite, nor will birds touch it. Yet it can be killed by weasels, and so men put them into the holes it hides in.

In this way, any powerful person of this world, who is infected by the poison of wrath, destroys the grass (the poor) with the breath of his malice, kills trees (the rich of this world, merchants and usurers), slays and burns the animals (those of his own household). He even pollutes the air of religious life: *he hath set his mouth against heaven, and his tongue hath passed through the earth* [cf. Ps 72.9]. Even the snakes (his friends and accomplices who know his malice) are terrified by his hissing. When his wrath is kindled, everyone takes flight, in all directions, running to hide themselves even in pig-sties! This savage lord, beside himself and inflamed by a devilish spirit, can be overcome only by weasels- the poor in spirit, who are not afraid of him because they have nothing to lose. People who are burdened with the dirt of money, who are afraid to approach him, take them to the holes he hides in. 'Speak to him,' they say. 'We don't dare to.'

Semei, who cursed David, represents whoever says 'Raca' to his brother; Joab represents the man who calls his brother 'Fool'. Solomon killed these three: Adonias, who wanted to be king- anger; Semei, who cursed David: Raca; Joab, who put to the sword men better than himself- the man who calls his brother 'Fool', striking him with the sword of his tongue. Alas! How often we sin mortally in these three ways, and how seldom (or never) we confess!

10. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause:

*Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we may serve sin no longer. For he that is dead is justified from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall live also together with him*. [Rom 6.6-8]

Note that sin is mentioned three times in this part; since it is destroyed three times in us,

these three (being angry, saying ‘Raca’, calling a fool) are destroyed in us. Then indeed the body of sin, the whole mass of sinful acts, such as wrath and envy, are destroyed when reason takes control. If our old man, the spontaneous movement of the mind, is crucified by the nails of divine fear: when it is crucified, we serve sin, the sin of anger, no more. We will not be angry with our brother, but will honour the crucified Christ in him. He that is dead, that has a mortified will, is justified from that sin, made just and free. This refers to calling one’s brother a fool. When the cause is removed, the effect ceases.

Beloved brothers, let us beseech the Lord Jesus Christ to take away anger from our hearts, and to give us peace of mind, so that we may love our neighbour in heart and mind and deed; and attain to him who is our peace. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the four-fold altar: *If thou offer thy gift*.)**

11. There follows, thirdly:

*If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother; and then coming, thou shalt offer thy gift*. [Mt 5.23-24]

The word used means ‘high altar’, the place where victims were burnt.

There are four sorts of altar: that above, that below, that within, and that without. The ‘altar above’ is the Trinity, of which the Lord says in Exodus:

*Thou shalt not go up by steps unto my altar, lest thy nakedness be discovered*. [Ex 20.26]

There are no degrees in the Trinity, such that the Father is regarded as greater than the Son, the Son less than the Father, or the Holy Spirit less than either. We hold them to be simply equal: What the Father is, that the Son is, and that the Holy Spirit. Lest thy nakedness be discovered, as was that of Arius. His entrails burst out, and he ended his life in shame, because he had wanted to go up to the altar by steps.

The ‘altar below’ is the humanity of Christ, of which he himself speaks in the same passage of Exodus:

*You shall make an altar of earth unto me*. [Ex 20.24]

He ‘makes an altar of earth’ to Jesus Christ, who believes that he took true flesh from the Virgin Mary, who was the ‘blessed earth’.

**(A sermon on inner devotion: *Make an altar of incense*.)**

12. The 'altar within' is the soul's devotion, of which the Lord spoke to Moses in Exodus, saying:

*Thou shalt make also an altar to burn incense, of setim wood. It shall be a cubit in length, and another in breadth...; and two in height. Horns shall go out of the same. And thou shalt overlay it with the purest gold*. [Ex 30.1-3]

Setim is a kind of thorn-tree, whose wood does not rot. When it is set fire to, it becomes still harder. Setim wood stands for the thoughts of the heart, which should have three characteristics. They should be like thorns, piercing the heart with the recollection of sin; they should not rot, not consenting to evil suggestions; and when they are burnt by the fire of tribulation, they should become even firmer in resolve.

The altar of the Lord is made of wood like this. *It should be a cubit*, etc. The length stands for perseverance, the breadth for love of neighbour, the height for contemplation of God. The natural cubit is the length from finger-tip to elbow, as Moses measured the ark and the altar. We lean on our elbows when we take food to eat in our hands. The cubit stands for right action. The altar of inner devotion should have right action in length of perseverance, as to oneself; and in breadth of charity, as to one's neighbour. It should have twice as much in height of contemplation, as to God, so that we refer to him both length of perseverance and breadth of charity, because from him comes all the good we have.

This altar should be overlaid with purest gold. The vesture of a devout mind is purity of golden chastity. It is the proper state of man to be clothed; the purity of chastity befits the soul. A right mind is known by its strict chastity. From this altar the incense-smoke goes up within the Holy of holies, where the ark is hidden. From compunction of mind goes up the sweet incense of pure prayer, and it reaches to heaven *where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God* [Col 3.1].

13. The 'altar without' is affliction of the flesh, of which the Lord spoke to Moses in Exodus, saying:

*Thou shalt make also an altar of holocaust of setim wood, which shall be five cubits long and as many broad... and three cubits high. And there shall be horns at the four corners of the same: and thou shalt cover it with brass*. [Ex 27.1-2]

Holocaust means 'wholly burnt'; the holocaust was an offering wholly consumed by fire. The altar of holocaust stands for our body, which we should wholly burn with the fire of penitence, and offer it as a holocaust to the Lord. It should be made of setim wood, limbs uncorrupted by lust.

It should be five cubits in length and breadth, and three in height. The five cubits are the

five wounds of Christ; the three are the three times he wept: over the city of Jerusalem, for Lazarus, and in his Passion. The cross of true penitence has length of perseverance, breadth of patience, and height of hope in the Father. On this cross let us crucify our body with the five wounds of Jesus Christ's body, mortifying the wretched pleasure of the five senses, weeping and mourning for the evil we have done, for the sins of our neighbour, and for glory deferred.

The four horns on the altar of incense and the altar of holocaust are the four chief virtues which adorn soul and body, of which the book of Wisdom says:

*She teacheth temperance and prudence and justice and fortitude, which are such things as men can have nothing more profitable in life*. [Wisd 8.7]

The Lord commands that this altar be covered with brass. Brass that resounds stands for the affliction of sighing and sorrow, with which the penitent's body should be clothed.

**(A sermon on the four-fold gift, and the four-fold brother: *If thou offer thy gift*.)**

14. Such is the four-fold altar, from which anyone can understand what the Lord is saying in today's Gospel: *If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar*, etc. Just as the altar is four-fold, so is the gift and so is our brother. There is the gift of prayer, of faith, of penitence and of almsgiving. Our brother may be any neighbour, Christ, our guardian angel or our own spirit. If you are offering the gift of prayer at the altar of the Holy Trinity, and there remember that your brother, your neighbour, has something against you- if you have hurt him by word or deed, or if you have any ill-will against him- then if you are at a distance, go: not on foot, but prostrating yourself in humility of heart before him in whose sight you are about to make your offering. If he is at hand, go hotfoot and beg his pardon.

Again, if you are offering the gift of faith at the altar of Jesus Christ's humanity (that is, if you believe that he took true flesh of the Virgin), and there remember that he your brother, who for your sake took your nature, has something against you- that is, if you remember that you are in mortal sin- even as you confess with the sound of your voice, leave your gift there. Do not trust in a dead faith, but go and first be reconciled by true penitence with your brother, Jesus Christ.

Again, if you are offering the gift of penitence at the altar- that is, the discipline of the flesh-and there remember that your brother, your own spirit, has something against you: that is, if you remember while you are afflicting your flesh that your spirit is stained with some sin, leave your gift there, do not trust in bodily affliction, until you have cleansed your spirit from all iniquity. Then you may come and offer your gift.

Again, if you are offering the gift of alms to the poor, and there remember that your brother, the angel who by grace at your very creation was entrusted by God with your care, to bear your prayers and alms-deeds up to heaven, has something against you:

that is, he complains against you that, when he prompted you to good, you turned away the ear of obedience: leave your gift there, do not trust in your dry almsgiving, but first go with steps of love to be reconciled by obedience to the guiding angel given to you as guardian, and then come and offer your gift by his hands, acceptable to God.

15. The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** with this third clause:

*Knowing that Christ rising again from the dead, dieth now no more, death shall no more have dominion over him. For in that he died to sin, he died once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God: so do you also reckon that you are dead to sin, but alive unto God, in Christ Jesus our Lord*. [Rom 6.9-11]

If you will look into this text carefully, you can find the four altars I have mentioned. When he says, *Christ rising again*, there is the altar of the Trinity. In the word *Christ*, we have the Son himself rising; the Father by whose glory (as said above) Christ rose*: death shall have no more dominion over him*, because he lives to God; and the Holy *Spirit* that *gives life*; and these three are One. When he adds, *In that he died*, there is the altar of humanity, which for our sake died once upon the altar of the Cross. When he goes on, *So do you also reckon that you are dead to sin*, there is the altar of holocaust, the affliction of the mortified body. What follows, *alive unto God*, is the altar of incense, the mind's devotion, whoever has which truly lives to God, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Through him we beg you, Father, whom you have made a propitiation for our sins, that you will accept our gifts through him, and grant us your grace and reconciliation with our brothers; so that, being reconciled upon the golden altar which is in the heavenly Jerusalem, we may be able to offer you, God, the gift of praise, with the blessed angels. Grant this, you who are God Three and One, blessed for ever and ever. Let every creature say: Amen. Alleluia.

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the seventh Sunday after Pentecost: *When there was a great multitude with Jesus;* which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon on the infusion of grace, on preaching, and on humility of mind: *When the minstrel played*.)**

1. At that time: *When there was a great multitude with Jesus, and they had nothing to eat*, etc. [Mk 8.1]

It says in the fourth book of Kings:

*When the minstrel played, the hand of the Lord came upon Eliseus, and he said: Thus saith the Lord: Make the channel of this torrent full of ditches. For thus saith the Lord: You shall not see wind, nor rain; and yet this channel shall be filled with waters. And you shall drink, you and your families, and your beasts*. [4(2)Kg 3.15-17]

When the minstrel, the Holy Spirit, the sweet singer in Israel, plays in the heart of the preacher: then the hand of the Lord comes upon Elisha, the preacher himself, endowing him with the gift of power and helping him with everything to which he puts his hand. Ezekiel says*, The hand of the Lord was upon me* [Ezek 3.22]. Unless this minstrel plays first, the tongue of the preacher will be dumb. If he does play, then the preacher can say to the people he is preaching to, *Make a channel*, etc. The channel, dried up by the heat, is the sinner who is parched of the moisture of grace, and fails to do good works. Zechariah says of him: *Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?* [Zech 3.2]. A brand is wood that has been charred, commonly called ‘charcoal’. This is the sinner whom the Lord plucks out of the fire of lust, with the hand of grace. Therefore make ditches and more ditches in the channel of this torrent: that is, in your heart, you sinners who are dried up with the fire of wickedness.

The ditch is three-fold: the recognition of guilt, sorrow for it, and the humiliation of patience. Of the first, the Lord says to Ezekiel:

*Son of man, dig in the wall*, [Ezek 8.8]

because the Lord is ready to enter if he finds even a little opening in the wall, that is, if you recognise your guilt.

*Behold, he standeth behind our wall*, [Cant 2.9]

says the Bride in the Canticles, ready to enter if he finds an opening. And in the same book:

*My beloved put his hand through the hole, and my bowels were moved at his touch*. [Cant 5.4]

The hand of divine grace reaches through the opening, our recognition of guilt, and at its touch our 'belly', our carnal mind, trembles. *Fear and trembling are come upon me* [Ps 54.6], because *the hand of the Lord hath touched me* [Job 19.21]. *The earth shook and trembled* [Pss 17.8; 76.19]; and *Saul, trembling and astonished, said: Lord, what wilt thou have me do?* [Ac 9.6].

Of the ditch of contrition, Isaiah says:

*Enter thou into the rock and hide thee in the pit:*

*from the face of the fear of the Lord and from the glory of his majesty*. [Is 2.10]

Enter by faith into the rock, the wounds of Jesus Christ; hide in the pit, contrition of heart, which will hide you from the face of fear before which the children of the sea of this world are afraid; and from the glory of his majesty, that greater power under which every power is crushed.

Of the ditch of patience, it was commanded in the Old Testament that there should be made around the altar a ditch one cubit deep, in which the ashes of the sacrifice might be placed [cf. Ezek 43.13]. St Gregory[1] says, "Unless there is patience in the altar of our hearts, the passing breeze will blow away the sacrifice of good works. As long as patience is not lost, unity is preserved."

Make, then, you sinners, ditch upon ditch in the channel of your hearts. Use the spade of divine fear, that you may recognise your guilt, crack open your hearts, and bear tribulation patiently. These are the Lord's words:

*You shall not see wind, nor rain; and yet this channel shall be filled with waters.*

In other words, without human comfort the heart of the sinner will be filled with the water of seven-fold grace, from which you and your families and your beasts shall drink. See how great the Lord's grace is, from which the soul and its family (the affections of the soul) may drink, with its cattle (the bodily senses which 'drink' when they agree with the

soul in what is good). Men and beasts drink alike, just and sinners, clever and simple. This is the great crowd that the Lord fed with seven loaves, as today's Gospel tells: When there was a great multitude with Jesus.

2. There are three things to note in this Gospel. First, Jesus Christ's pity for the crowd, beginning: *When there was a great multitude*. Second, the giving of the seven loaves and the fishes to the crowd, and their feeding, as it adds: *And his disciples answered him*, etc. Third, the seven baskets filled with fragments, as it concludes: *And they took up that which was left*, etc.

Note that this Sunday and next, we shall by God's grace **concord** various stories from the fourth book of Kings with the clauses of this and the following Gospel. In the Introit of this Sunday's Mass we sing: *We have received thy mercy, O God*. The Epistle of blessed Paul to the Romans is read: *I speak a human thing, because of the infirmity of your flesh*; which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the three clauses of the holy Gospel. The first part is: *I speak a human thing*. The second is: *When you were the servants of sin*. The third is: *But now being made free from sin*.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the famine in Samaria: *Benadad gathered*.)**

3. Let us say, then:

*When there was a great multitude with Jesus, and they had nothing to eat, calling his disciples together, he saith to them: I have compassion on the multitude, for behold they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat. And if I shall send them away fasting to their own home, they will faint in the way; for some of them came from afar off*. [Mk 8.1-3]

There is a **concordance** to this in the fourth book of Kings, where it says that:

*Benadad king of Syria gathered together all his army, and went up, and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and so long did the siege continue, till the head of an ass was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cabe of pigeons' dung, for five pieces of silver*. [4(2)Kg 6.24-25]

And a little further on:

*And Eliseus said: Hear ye the word of the Lord: Thus saith the Lord: Tomorrow about this time a bushel of fine flour shall be sold for a stater, and two bushels of barley for a stater, in the gate of Samaria*. [4(2)Kg 7.1]

Let us see what is meant by Benadad and his army, Samaria, the famine, the ass's head

and the eighty pieces of silver, the fourth part of the pigeons' dung and the five pieces of silver, Elisha, the bushel of fine flour and the stater, and the two bushels of barley.

Benadad means 'son of self-will', and he represents Lucifer, who though he was the son of creating grace, fell of his own self-will, no-one compelling him, and so irrevocably. Therefore Isaiah says:

*How art thou fallen, O Lucifer, who didst rise in the morning?* [Is 14.12]

He is king of Syria, meaning 'high' or 'well-watered'; the land of those lifted up by pride, and soaked in lust. He besieges Samaria with his army. The army, ready to wage war, represents the evil spirits who constantly and daily wage war against the soul. With this army the devil besieges Samaria, 'guard', the Holy Church or the faithful soul which is kept safe by keeping the law.

**(An allegorical and a moral sermon on the little city besieged by a king, and on the rest that follows, and what it means: *A little city*.)**

4. Of this city and its besieging, Solomon says in Ecclesiastes:

*A little city, and few men in it: there came against it a great king, and invested it, and built bulwarks round about it: and the siege was perfect. Now there was found in it a man poor and wise, and he delivered the city by his wisdom: and no man afterwards remembered that poor man.* [Eccles 9.14-15]

Let us see the meaning of the city, the few men, the great king, the walls, bulwarks and siege, the poor man, and the deliverance of the city: first allegorically, and then morally.

The city is the Church, which is called 'little' in comparison with bad people, who are far more numerous than good. So Solomon says:

*The perverse are hard to be corrected, and the number of fools is infinite*. [Eccles 1.15]

The perverse, who turn away, with their backs to God and not their faces, are hard to correct: since their hearts are not set in the way of the just, they are hard to control. Likewise, the number of fools who are dull of heart is infinite. Isaiah says:

*Thou hast multiplied the nation and hast not increased joy*. [Is 9.3]

*And few men it it*. There are many 'women' in the Church, soft and weak, but, alas! few 'men' in it, strong in virtue. *Women have ruled over my people*, says the Lord by Isaiah [Is 3.12], meaning feeble prelates. And Solomon says, in Proverbs, *O ye men, to you I call* [Prov 8.4]. Wisdom calls to 'men', not 'women', because the savour of inner sweetness influences the person who is strong in virtue and of a careful and prudent

disposition. But *there are few men in it*, few to relish the savour of inner sweetness. They are all like women, with a womanish desire for expensive clothes, dainty food, comfortable service, fine buildings, decorated harness for their horses. This shows, clearly, whether they are women or men! See what sort of apostles the Lord has committed the rule of his Church to!

There follows: *There came against it a great king*. The great king is the devil, whom Job calls, King over all the children of pride [Job 41.25]. He does three things: he walls it round, throws up bulwarks, and so makes the siege perfect. The wall would be made of sharp stakes. The bulwarks and fortifications defended by the wall are heretics, fixed like sharp stakes in the eyes of the faithful. The bulwarks are all false Christians. The devil besieges the Church with the wall of heretics and the bulwarks of false Christians; and there are few men in it. But *fear not, little flock* [Lk 12.32]. Fear not this siege, because *the Lord will make also with the temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it.* [1Cor 10.13].

So there follows: *There was found in it a poor man*. The poor man is Christ, a 'man' according to his divinity, 'poor' by his humanity. See how well **concordant** are the details: he is a man, they are men; he is poor, they are few. Being wise, against the craftiness of the devil, he delivers the town from the wall of heresy and the bulwark of carnality, and thus by his wisdom he destroys the whole siege-work. Yet how sad is what follows:

*And no man afterwards remembered that poor man*. Indeed, worse still, they say to him in Job: *Depart from us. We desire not the knowledge of thy ways* [Job 21.14]. And yet worse again, they deny him and cry out with the Jews: *Not this man, but Barabbas* [Jn 18.40]. Barabbas was a robber, a man put in prison because of the murder and sedition he had committed in the city [cf. Lk 23.18-19]. This is the devil, who was thrust down to hell because of his rebellion in heaven. They ask for the release of this robber, and crucify the Son of God who freed them. So:

*Woe to their souls, for evils are rendered to them!* [Is 3.9]

5. Morally. The city is the soul, which is called 'little' because nearly everyone deserts it, to go down and live in the plain of bodily pleasure. So Genesis tells how, after separating from Abraham,

*Lot abode in the towns that were about the Jordan*. [Gen 13.12]

Lot means 'going down', and Jordan is 'descent'; Sodom means 'silent flock'. When wretched man separates from Abraham, the care of his soul, he dwells in the towns about the Jordan: the bodily senses, in the downward flow of temporal things. He lives in Sodom, because he is like a sheep destined for slaughter, being silent from the praise of his Creator and the confession of his sin.

There follows: *and few men in it*. The 'men' of the soul are the affections of reason, of which the Lord spoke to the Samaritan woman in John's Gospel:

*Thou hast had five men; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband*. [Jn 4.18]

The affections of reason are called 'five men', because they ought to regulate the five senses of the body; when the unhappy soul loses them, she gets not a husband but an adulterous lover who corrupts her.

So there is added: *A great king came against it*. The 'great king' is the carnal appetite, sensuality, of which Solomon says in Ecclesiastes:

*Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child,*

*and when the princes eat in the morning*. [Eccles 10.16]

The carnal appetite is called both 'great' and 'a child': great, because it goes after great and impossible things; a child, because it lacks judgement and discretion. Woe to the land, then, the body that has such a king. Its princes, the five bodily senses, eat in the morning, starting to get drunk with gluttony and lust, from childhood on. Solomon says:

*He that nourisheth his son delicately from his childhood,*

*afterwards shall find him stubborn*. [Prov 29.21]

This great king walls in the soul with the sharp stakes of instinctive movements, builds round it the bulwarks of depraved thoughts and carnal desires, and so makes the siege perfect. See, then, in the fourth book of Kings, how Benadad the king of Syria besieges the Holy Church or the faithful soul.

But the true Elisha comes and saves the Church. The poor man comes, the Holy Spirit, called 'poor' because he dwells in the poor in spirit, and *his communication is with the simple* [Prov 3.32], and he delivers the soul from this great siege. But how sad is what follows after: *And no man afterwards remembered that poor man*. As it tells in Genesis, the king's butler, *when things prospered with him, forgot his interpreter* [Gen 41.54]. "Constant temporal success is a sure sign of eternal damnation."[2]

**(A sermon on the five books of Moses, and their interpretation and meaning.)**

6. Let us return to our matter, and say: *Benadad king of Syria besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and so long did the siege continue, till the head of an ass was sold for fourscore pieces of silver*. Little by little, the food of grace is withdrawn from the Church, or the soul, when it is besieged by the devil. When it is withdrawn, a great hunger, a burning desire for temporal things, arises in the Church.

Genesis says of this famine that it prevailed in the whole world, and so the sons of Jacob went down into Egypt to buy corn [cf. Gen 41.54; 42.3]. When, because our sins hard press us, the food of grace is withdrawn, everyone hungers for temporal things, the food of the body, not of the soul, seeking not the things of Jesus Christ but what they have in Egypt.

In the end, the famine becomes so great that an ass's head is sold for eighty pieces of silver. The eighty silver pieces stand for the double robe, which consists of the eight blessings we are to receive on the eighth day of the Resurrection. The body will have brightness, agility, subtlety and immortality; the soul will have wisdom, joy, harmony betwen flesh and spirit, and friendship with God and neighbour. Unhappy sinners give these silver pieces to buy an ass's head, that asinine stupidity which is the world's wisdom, which is foolishness to God [cf. 1Cor 3.19].

*And the fourth part of a cabe of pigeons' dung, for five pieces of silver*. The 'cabe' is a Greek measure. The pigeons are the saints, who fly to their windows [Is 60.8]. The dung means temporal things. The five silver pieces are five virtues, represented by the five books of Moses. The first book of Moses is called, in Hebrew, *Beresith*; Greek *Genesis*, or 'beginning'. The second is *Veelle Semoth* in Hebrew, Greek *Exodus*, or 'going out'. The third, in Hebrew *Vaicra*, is in Greek *Leviticus*, or 'ministry'. The fourth is *Vaidebbar* in Hebrew, *Rhythmus* in Greek, or 'number'. The fifth is *Elle Addebarim* in Hebrew, *Deuteronomy* ('second law') in Greek, a prefiguration of the Gospel Law. Genesis, in which the beginning of everything is described, stands for baptismal innocence by which we are reborn according to the new man. Exodus, which describes the going out of the children of Israel from Egypt, stands for religious piety by which we go out from the world. Leviticus, wherein sacrifice is offered, stands for the affliction of the flesh. Numbers, wherein the people are counted, stands for the confession of sin, in which all sins should be enumerated. Deuteronomy, the love of God and neighbour, is the Gospel Law *on which the Law and the prophets depend* [cf. Mt 22.40].

Wretched sinners give these five silver pieces to buy pigeons' dung, temporal things which the saints reckon as dung. See how grievous is the famine in the Church, that multitude of which today's Gospel says: *When there was a great multitude with Jesus, and they had nothing to eat*. This unruly crowd, disturbing everything, is with Jesus nominally, but not in spirit; in word but not in merit. But what does the merciful Jesus say, he who always knows how to have compassion on the wretched? *I have compassion on the multitude, for behold they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat*.

7. This is what Elisha says in the fourth book of Kings: *Tomorrow about this time a bushel of fine flour shall be sold for a stater, and two bushels of barley for a stater, in the gate of Samaria*. The bushel measure contains forty-four pounds, or twelve sextarii. The kind of flour indicated is the whitest and finest of grains. The stater is worth three *solidi*, weighing three gold pieces. The barley dries more quickly than other kinds of grain. Thus the bushel of fine flour means the perfect measure of divine wisdom, which is found in the New Testament. The two bushels of barley are the knowledge of the Law and the

prophets, which are worth a stater in the gate of Samaria, the catholic faith in the preaching of the Apostles, whereby we enter the Church. When the storm of persecution abates, as happens today, then the Lord will give peace tomorrow, in the future, so that preaching may be perfectly fulfilled.

Alternatively: the bushel of flour is the remission of sins; the two bushels of barley are contempt for temporal things and an appetite for eternal things; the stater (weighing three gold pieces) is penitence, which consists in these three: contrition, confession and satisfaction. This stater is found in the fish's mouth, taken from the water by Peter's hook, to free Christ and himself from the tribute [cf. Mt 17.26]. The fish is the sinner, pulled from the water of worldly pleasure by the hook of preaching. In its mouth is found the stater of penitence, which sets body and soul free from the tribute of guilt and punishment in hell. The sinner who once paid eighty-five silver pieces to buy an ass's head and some pigeons' dung, can now buy with a stater of true penitence a bushel of flour, the grace of forgiveness whereby God forgives all his sins, and two bushels of barley, so that he may despise the dung of temporal things and seek the things that are eternal. See how great is the mercy of our Redeemer, who said, *I have compassion on the multitude, for behold they have now been with me three days*. The three days means the same as the stater, which weighs three gold pieces.

There is a **concordance** to this in the fourth book of Kings, where Elisha says to Joas:

*Strike with an arrow upon the ground. And he struck three times*. [4(2)Kg 13.18]

Joas means 'hoping', and he stands for the penitent who hopes in God's mercy, at whose command he strikes the earth (his body) three times with the arrow of penance. Those who wait upon the Lord for three days, he will not send away fasting to their homes. Rather, he feeds them with the bushel of fine flour and the two bushels of barley, lest they grow faint in the way. *Some of them came from afar off*, he says. The prodigal son came from afar off, the 'far country'. When the sinner comes back to the Father from afar, he is received all the more with mercy.

*When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion and running to him fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, I am not now worthy to be called thy son*. [Lk 15.20f]

Well does the Lord say, *I have compassion on the multitude*. There is a very good **concordance** to this mercy in the Introit of today's Mass.

**(A moral sermon on the court-yard, gate, middle and oracle of the temple, and on the four horses and their meaning: *We have received, O Lord*.)**

8. *We have received thy mercy, O God, in the midst of thy temple.* [Ps 47.10]

Note that there are four parts to the temple: the court-yard, the door, the middle and the oracle. Some are in the court-yard: these are false brethren. Some are at the door: these are the newly converted. Some are in the middle: these are those making progress. Those who are becoming perfect are in the oracle. They are represented by the four horses which John saw in the Apocalypse. He saw pale horse; a black horse whose rider had a pair of scales in his hand; a red horse whose rider was given that he should take peace from the earth, and a great sword was given him; and a white horse, whose rider had a bow [cf. Apoc 6.8,5,4,2].

The pale horse stands for false brethren, pretenders and luke-warm, who provoke God's anger upon them. They are in the court-yard, of which the Apocalypse says*: The court that is without, cast out and measure it not* [Apoc 11.2]. False hypocrites shall be cast out of the city of Jerusalem, when the door is shut, those who now are not measured with the measure of truth. This 'court' is more like a cave, a place for the kitchens and the latrines. The hypocrites who now 'cook' their flesh by afflicting it, in a kitchen of pretended holiness, will be cast into the latrine of eternal shame.

The black horse stands for the newly converted, who put away the false brightness of the world and assume the dark robe of penitence. In the Lamentations of Jeremiah, they say:

*Our skin was burnt as an oven*. [Lam 5.10]

They are burnt by the fire of contrition and the labour of satisfaction, burnt on the outside, the skin of a mortified body.

They should have a pair of scales in their hands. There is a **concordance** in the first part of today's Epistle, where the Apostle speaks to the newly converted:

*I speak a human thing, because of the infirmity of your flesh. For as you have yielded your members to serve uncleanness and iniquity, unto iniquity; so now yield your members to serve justice, unto sanctification*. [Rom 6.19]

*I speak a human thing*, that is, I speak lightly, where I ought to speak of greater things: but I do not say them, because of the weakness of your flesh, of what comes from your flesh. St Augustine says in the Gloss[3] , "If you do not serve justice more, at least serve it as much as you served iniquity. He says, a human thing; for justice should now be loved more than iniquity was then." The newly converted should have a pair of scales in their hand, so that as they once gave their bodies to the service of uncleanness, lust and iniquity (which lead to a further evil, a very bad end), they should now give their bodies to serve justice, leading to sanctification, the consummation of good.

These are in the door-way of the temple, of which John says in the Apocalypse:

*I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven*. [Apoc 4.1]

The open door is God's mercy, ready to welcome penitents. Of this door or gate, Ezekiel says:

*Behold, a man whose appearance was like the appearance of brass,*

*with a line of flax in his hand and a measuring reed in his hand:*

*and he stood in the gate*. [Ezek 40.3]

This man represents the penitent. His appearance is like brass, because brass is resounding and durable, and it represents the sound of confession and perseverance to the end. The penitent should have both these qualities. The line of flax is the performance of satisfaction; the measuring reed is doctrine: when we measure our actions, this measuring reed is in our hand. If a man has all these, he can safely stand in the gate, that is, he can trust in God's mercy.

The red horse stands for those making progress, fervent in spirit and rejoicing in trials. They take peace from the earth (their flesh), which those who are Christ's crucify with its vices and concupiscences [Gal 5.24]. To them a great sword is given, by which discretion is meant, which they should have in their works of penitence. They are in the middle of the temple, the wideness of charity, in which they receive the mercy of the Lord. *We have received thy mercy in the midst of thy temple*, they say.

The white horse stands for the perfect, who are already in the holy place, gazing on the glory of the cherubim, tasting the manna of divinity contained in the golden urn of humanity. They have the bow of victory in their hands, triumph over the world the flesh and the devil.

Let us then, dearest brothers, ask the Lord Jesus Christ to look upon us with the eyes of mercy, to rescue us from famine, and lead us into the temple of his glory. May he grant this, who lives and reigns for endless ages. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on Naaman the leper, who washed seven times in the Jordan, and the meaning of this: *Eliseus said to Naaman*.)**

9. There follows, secondly:

*And his disciples answered him: From whence can anyone fill them here with bread in the wilderness? And he asked them: How many loaves have ye? Who said: Seven. And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground. And taking the seven loaves, giving thanks, he broke and gave to his disciples for to set before them; and they set*

*them before the people. And they had a few little fishes; and he blessed them and commended them to be set them before them. And they did eat and were filled*. [Mk 8.4-8]

There is a **concordance** to this in the fourth book of Kings, where Elisha tells Naaman the leper:

*Go, and wash seven times in the Jordan, and thy flesh shall recover health; and thou shalt be clean... And Naaman went down and washed in the Jordan seven times, according to the word of the man of God. And his flesh was restored, like the flesh of a little child; and he was made clean*. [4(2)Kg 5.10,14]

The seven loaves and the seven washings in Jordan have the same meaning. Naaman means ‘handsome’, and he represents the man who used to be beautiful with grace, but then becomes a leper in the stench of sin. Leprosy is marked by scabs and much itching. That man is a leper, for whom the poison of evil thoughts, in the broken skin of divine fear, breaks out into the leprosy of evil deeds; and the more he scratches with the hand of evil habit, the more the irritation becomes inflamed with burning pain. Elisha (that is, Jesus Christ) tells this leper: *Go, and wash seven times in the Jordan*. Jordan means ‘stream of judgement’, and it stands for confession, wherein a man washes himself as in a stream, while he judges and condemns himself.

He should wash himself seven times in this Jordan, if he wants to deserve healing. The Apostle says of these in the second Epistle to the Corinthians:

*Behold, this selfsame thing, that you were made sorrowful according to God, how great carefulness it worketh in you; yea defence, yea indignation, yea fear, yea desire, yea zeal, yea revenge*. [2Cor 7.11]

This sorrow, divided into three parts, stands for penitence: which consists in heartfelt contrition, oral confession, and satisfaction in deed. This sorrow is according to God, and so it works salvation, that is to say, those things that lead to salvation; namely carefulness to put right what we have done wrong. As the Lord said:

*Martha, Martha, thou art careful and art troubled about many things*. [Lk 10.41]

*Yea defence*. To defend is to protect. When we are stripped bare in confession, we are protected. St Augustine says[4] , "If you uncover yourself, God will cover you." When we accuse ourselves, we are defending ourselves.

*Yea indignation*, against ourselves, because of the evil we have done. Ezekiel says: *I went away in bitterness in the indignation of my spirit*.[Ezek 3.14]

*Yea fear*, lest such a thing befall in the future. Fear makes us leave nothing undone that

should be done. A ‘timid’ person fears too much. Fear is a sorrow accidental to the mind, extrinsic to what occasions it. Fear is chaste when the soul is afraid of losing the grace that enables it not to take pleasure in sin. And it fears to lose it, even apart from any punishment that might follow.

*Yea desire*, to do better. To desire is to seek avidly. We desire what we do not have, that we have not yet received. So it says in the second book of Kings that:

*David said: O that some man would get me a drink of the water out of the cistern, that is in Bethlehem, by the gate*. [2Kg(Sm) 23.15]

Just so, penitents should desire the water of that river John speaks of in the Apocalypse:

*The angel showed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal*. [Apoc 22.1]

This water is in Bethlehem (meaning ‘house of bread’), the refreshment of eternal life; and it is by the gate, Jesus Christ, because no-one can enter to draw water except by him. No-one can come to the Father, but by me [Jn 14.6].

*Yea zeal*, to imitate the life of the saints. *Be zealous for the better gifts*, he says [1Cor12.31]

*Yea revenge*. Luke says that the widow besought the judge every day, *Avenge me of my adversary* [Lk 18.3]. The widow is the soul, which appeals to the judge, reason, to avenge her against her adversary, the carnal appetite which is always contrary to the soul. This is the judge who *does not carry the sword in vain* [cf. Rom 13.4], to the praise of good affections and vengeance on evildoers, (carnal ones) [cf. 1Pt 2.14]. He who washes seven times in the Jordan is cleansed of all the leprosy of sin, and is fed with the loaves of sevenfold grace, as is told in today’s Gospel: *And taking the seven loaves, giving thanks, he broke.*

But note: before they are fed with the seven loaves, they are told to sit down on the ground. Anyone who wants to be fed with these seven loaves, must needs first sit down on the ground, his flesh which he must chastise. So it says in the fourth book of Kings that Naaman took with him some of the soil of Israel, so that he might stand on it to adore the God whose land it was [cf. 4(2)Kg 5.17-18]. In this way the just man stands on the earth of his body and treads it down by the virtue of discretion, worshipping God in spirit and in truth [Jn 4.23]. Note that with the seven loaves he blessed a few small fishes and ordered them to be set before those that sat. The little fishes are poverty, humility, patience, obedience, and the remembrance of Jesus Christ’s Passion; with which we season the seven loaves, to make them more tasty.

10. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause of the Gospel:

*For when you were the servants of sin, you were free men to justice. What fruit therefore had you then in those things of which you are now ashamed?* [Rom 6.20-21]

In this part of the Epistle the Apostle speaks to converted sinners, who before they sat on the ground, before they washed seven times in Jordan, and before they were fed with the seven loaves, were servants of sin and free from justice- that is, lacking the dominion of justice. He who serves sin withdraws himself from the liberty of justice. *What fruit therefore had you?* he asks. St Augustine[5] says, "Shame is the greatest part of penitence." Penitents are ashamed that they were lepers, ashamed that they did such things as brought forth death, not fruit.

We ask you then, Lord Jesus, to cleanse us from the leprosy of sin, to feed us with the bread of your grace, and to set us in the banquet of heavenly blessedness. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

THIRD CLAUSE.

**(An allegorical and a moral sermon on Elisha and the raising of the Sunamite's son, and the meaning of times.)**

11. There follows, thirdly:

*And they took up that which was left of the fragments, seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand; and he sent them away*. [Mk 8.8-9]

The seven baskets represent just men, full of the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit. Baskets are made from rushes and palm-leaves. The rush grows by the waterside, and it clings there with dense roots. The palm crowns the victor. The saints root themselves in the very well-spring of life, so as not to be parched of the water of eternity, and wait for the palm of their eternal reward. Alternatively, the seven baskets are the seven first-founded Churches, which the Lord filled with the inspiration of sevenfold grace. This is signified by the child whom Elisha raised.

There is, then, a **concordance** to this in the fourth book of Kings, where it says that:

*Eliseus arose and followed the Sunamite. But Giezi was gone before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child: and there was no voice nor sense... Eliseus therefore went into the house... and shut the door upon him, and upon the child, and prayed to the Lord. And he went up, and lay upon the child: and he put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he bowed himself upon him. And the child's flesh grew warm. Then he returned and walked in the house, once to and fro. And he went up and lay upon him: and he gaped upon the child seven times, and he opened his eyes*. [4(2)Kg 4.30-35]

When the Lord gave the Law through Moses, he was, as it were, sending his servant with his staff; but the servant could not raise the dead with the staff, the terror of the Law, because *the Law brings no-one to perfection* [cf. Heb 7.19]. Coming himself, he prostrated himself upon the corpse, because he,

*being in the form of God... emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.*[Phil 2.6-7]

He walked to and fro, calling both the Jews and the Gentiles to eternal things by faith. He breathed seven times upon the dead, because he opened the divine treasury and breathed out the grace of the Sevenfold Spirit upon those lying in the death of sin. And soon, the child whom the rod of terror could not raise was brought back to life by the spirit of love.

12. Morally. Elisha is the prelate who raises the dead, the soul entrusted to him, not by the rod of harsh discipline but rather by prayer and bowing down in kindness. St Augustine[6] says: "A prelate should rather want to be loved by you, than feared." Love makes what is hard pleasant, what is unbearable light; while fear makes even light things unbearable.

*He put his mouth upon his mouth*. The prelate puts his mouth upon the sinner's mouth when he preaches to him, so that he in turn tells his sins in confession. So Isaiah says:

*The Lord hath given me a learned tongue,*

*that I should know how to uphold by word him that is weary.* [Is 50.4]

He puts his eyes upon his eyes, when he sheds tears for his blindness, as Samuel did, when the Lord said in the first book of Kings:

*How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, whom I have rejected?* [1Kg(Sm) 16.1]

He puts his hands upon his hands, when he himself performs good works, for the other's evil work; so that if he cannot be raised either by the rod or by prayer, may be recalled to life at least by the example of good works.

There follows*: and he gaped upon the child seven times, and the child opened his eyes*. To gape is to open the mouth. The prelate 'gapes' upon the face of the child when he instructs the people committed to him in the faith of Holy Church, which consists in seven articles; and in this way the people open their eyes. They see by faith the one they will see in his beauty. And in doing this, the prelate feeds the people committed to him, as it were four thousand men, with seven loaves; he instructs them in the seven articles of faith, and the teaching of the four Evangelists.

13. The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this third clause:

*But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have fruit unto sanctification, and the end life everlasting. For the wages of sin is death. But the grace of God, life everlasting, in Christ Jesus our Lord*. [Rom 6.22-23]

Jeremiah says: *Break up anew your fallow ground, and sow not upon thorns* [Jer 4.3], and this is what the Apostle means here by *being made free from sin, and become servants to God*. The going out from sin brings about the entrance to virtue. Note that the Apostle touches on four things: freedom from sin, service to God, sanctification of life, and eternal life. This is the pattern to live by, this is the way that leads to life. He who does not walk in it is *like one blind and groping* [cf. 2Pt 1.9]. Freedom from sin brings about service to God, God's service brings about sanctification of life, and sanctification attains eternal life. He who is supported by these four pillars will be satisfied (along with the four thousand men whom the Lord fed with the seven loaves) in eternal blessedness, when the glory of the Lord shall appear [cf. Ps 16.15]. Christ will give this reward to those who serve him.

But what does the devil give to his soldiers? The Apostle says*, the wages of sin is death*. Your wage is what is weighed out to you. The ancients used to weigh out money, rather than count it. The word used, 'stipend', referred to soldiers. This then is the 'stipend' of the slaves of sin: death. But to those freed from sin, the servants of God, it is his grace, because of which there will be *life everlasting, in Christ Jesus our Lord*, to whom be honour and glory.

Let us humbly implore him, then, dearest brothers, that he, who deigned to feed the four thousand men with seven loaves, will strengthen us with the four virtues and enliven us with the inspiration of sevenfold grace, so that we may be able to attain to him, who is the life and the bread of angels. May he grant this, who is to be praised and glorified, magnified and exalted, for ever and ever. Let every spirit say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] GREGORY, *Regula Pastoralis* III, 9; PL 77.60

[2] GREGORY, *Moralia* XXVI, 18,35; PL 76.368

[3] GLOSSA ORDINARIA, Rom 6.19

[4] AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in psalmos*, Ps 31,II,15; PL 36.267

[5] ps-AUGUSTINE, *De vera et falsa poenitentia*, 10.25; PL 40.1122

[6] AUGUSTINE, *Regula ad servos Dei*, 11; PL 32.1384

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the eighth Sunday after Pentecost: *Beware of false prophets*, which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a sermon on the guest-chamber the faithful soul prepares for Jesus Christ: *The Sunamite woman said*.)**

1. At that time, Jesus said to his disciples*: Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep*, etc. [Mt 7.15]

It says in the fourth book of Kings that the Sunamite woman said to her husband, concerning Elisha:

*I perceive that this is a holy man of God, who often passeth by us. Let us therefore make him a little chamber, and put a little bed in it for him, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick, that when he cometh to us, he may abide there*. [4(2)Kg 4.9-10]

Let us see what is meant by Elisha, the Sunamite and her husband, the chamber, the bed, the table, the stool and the candlestick. Elisha means 'salvation of my God', and he represents Jesus Christ, who is sent by God the Father for the salvation of his people. He comes to the Sunamite (meaning 'captive', or 'scarlet'), the soul which Christ redeems from captivity to the devil with his blood, whom he stays with when he gives her life, and whom he 'passes by' when he withdraws his grace to humble her, because she thinks too highly of herself. The Sunamite's husband is the rational intellect, which should rule over the soul with the strength and insight native to it, or given by grace; and which should counsel and guide her, and engender in her a progeny of virtue and good works. The soul takes counsel with this husband, saying, *I perceive that this is a holy man of God*, etc.

The chamber stands for unity, the bed for chastity, the table for the delight of contemplation, the stool for contempt of self, and the candlestick for the light of good example. The word used for the room means strictly a common dining room, where many sit down to eat. That is why it signifies the unity of the faithful, of which the Bridegroom says in Canticles:

*Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse:*

*with one of thy eyes, and with one hair of thy head.* [Cant 4.9]

The one-ness of the eyes is the harmony of prelates, who should enlighten the whole Church as the eye does in the whole body. The hair that hangs from the head represents all the faithful, who hold to Christ their Head. The Bridegroom is wounded by the wound of love, so as to love the Church, when he sees in her the unity of prelates in accord with those under them. The chamber of unity should be ‘a little one’, by humility, which is the cement holding subjects and prelates together.

The little bed denotes chastity; whence Canticles says: *Our bed is flowery* [Cant 1.15]. The bed of conscience should be flowery with the lilies of purity. The table is the sweetness of contemplation, of which the psalm says: *Thou hast prepared a table before me* [Ps 22.5]. When the mind is raised up to taste that sweetness, every trial borne is reckoned cheap. That sweetness so affects the mind, that it does not know how to grieve for pain. The stool, for sitting on, is self contempt. Jeremiah says in Lamentations: *He shall sit solitary and hold his peace* [Lam 3.28]. He shall ‘sit’ in self-abasement, ‘solitary’ from the tumult of worldly people and the remembrance of them. He ‘holds his peace’ from poisonous words. The candlestick (which we should not hide under a bushel, but put on a mountain, to light everyone in the house [cf. Mt 5.15]) stands for the light of good example. The soul should prepare this chamber, furnished like this by the advice of her husband, for the true Elisha; not for the false prophets, heretics or hypocrites, of whom the Lord says in today’s Gospel: *Beware of false prophets*, etc.

2. There are three things to note in this Gospel. First, the pretence of hypocrites, as it begins: *Beware of false prophets*. Second, the fruitfulness of the good tree and the cutting down of the unfruitful, as it continues: *Even so every good tree*. Third, the expulsion from the kingdom of those who talk but fail to do; and the reception of those who do the will of God, as it concludes*: Not everyone that saith to me, Lord, Lord*, etc. We will **concord** with these clauses some stories from the fourth book of Kings.

In the Introit of this Sunday’s Mass we sing: *Behold, God is my protector*; and the Epistle of blessed Paul to the Romans is read: *We are debtors not to the flesh*, which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the three clauses of the Gospel. The first part is: *We are debtors*. The second: *Whosoever are led by the Spirit of God*. The third: *For the Spirit himself giveth testimony to our spirit*.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A sermon against false prophets: *From the prophets of Jerusalem*.)**

3. Let us say, then:

*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they*

*are ravening wolves. By their fruits you shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?* [Mt 7.15-16]

Note these three: the false prophets, the sheep's clothing, and the ravening wolves. The false prophets are hypocrites, of whom Jeremiah says:

*From the prophets of Jerusalem corruption is gone forth into all the land*. [Jer 23.15]

They are the prophets of Jezebel (meaning, 'dungheap'). While they love salutations in the market-place, and chairs in the synagogues [cf. Mt 23.6], they prophecy a heap of dung, being *as dung for the earth* [Ps 82.11]. The prophet Micah says of these prophets:

*Thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth and preach peace: and if a man give not something into their mouth, they sanctify war against him*. [Mic 3.5]

Note the four phrases: 'make err', 'bite', preach', 'sanctify'. The false prophets lead astray innocents by their persuasive words. They bite with detraction, infecting and causing death with their bite. Detraction is deadly, and is like a road by which death enters the soul. They preach peace, so as to appear men of peace, but *the way of peace they have not known* [Ps 13.3]. They are robber priests, who bite with curses those who do not give to them, while to those who do give they preach peace and promise mercy. They declare a 'holy war' on those who will not give. They reckon it holy and just to persecute those who do not give, and they wield the sword of excommunication. They bestow a solemn blessing on those who do give, though they themselves are cursed by the Lord, and he curses their blessings [cf. Mal 2.2]. They say to those who give, 'You are children of the Church, who honour your mother and relieve her poverty, and so you are blessed for giving to her.' Tell me, you false prophets, you thieves and murderers, what is the Church but the faithful soul for whom the Lord gave up his own dear life to death, to make her without spot or wrinkle? The Lord will bless whoever gives this Church what is her own. But alas, alas! "Today a donkey stumbles, and someone will lift it up; but if a soul perishes, there is no-one to help."[1] If they were true prophets, they would be saying with the true prophet Jeremiah:

*Woe is me, for my soul hath fainted because of them that are slain*. [Jer 4.31]

*Woe is me for the sorrow of my people...*

*Who will give water to my head and a fountain of tears to my eyes,*

*and I will weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people*. [Jer 9.1]

There is a **concordance** to this in the fourth book of Kings, where Elisha

*was troubled, and the man of God wept. And Hazael said to him: Why doth my lord weep? And he said: Because I know the evil that thou wilt do to the children of Israel. Their strong cities thou wilt burn with fire, and their young men thou wilt kill with the sword: and thou wilt dash their children, and rip up their pregnant women.* [4(2)Kg 8.11-12]

Elisha represents the good prelate of the Church, who should weep till he is red-eyed because Hazael (the devil) sets fire to the cities (the souls of the faithful) with the fire of avarice; he kills their young men (virtues) with the sword of temptation; he dashes their children (good works still not fully-formed); and rips up their pregnant women (the intentions of their good will). Who would not weep for such evils? But the false prophets do not care; they get as much as they can grab. Well does the Lord say, *Beware*, be very wary indeed, *of false prophets*. They are false, because they say what is not true. *They say: Peace, peace. And there is no peace* [Jer 6.14].

So it says in the third book of Kings that Ahab,

*the king of Israel, assembled the prophets, about four hundred men, and he said to them: Shall I go to Ramoth Galaad to fight, or shall I forbear? They answered: Go up, and the Lord will deliver it into the hands of the king*. [3(1)Kg 22.6]

A little later on, Michaeas the true prophet of the Lord said of them:

*Behold, the Lord hath given a lying spirit in the mouth of all thy prophets that are here: and the Lord hath spoken evil against thee*. [3(1)Kg 22.23]

Ahab represents the lover of this world, who wants to go up to Ramoth Galaad to do battle against the Lord. Ramoth is ‘vision of death’, and Galaad is ‘mound of witness’. They stand for the honours and riches of this world, in which is the vision of eternal death, and heaped-up testimony of damnation against those lovers. When he wants to go up there, he consult false prophets as to whether he ought to. The modern priests give their advice: "Go up; there is no sin in having riches, getting honours. You can still be saved in such circumstances." Would that a Michaeas would arise, a prophet of the Lord! He would convict those diviners and ventriloquists of telling lies, *and stop the mouth of them that speak wicked things* [Ps 62.12], by the authority of Jesus Christ, who says in Luke:

*Woe to you that are rich; for you have your consolation. Woe to you that are filled; for you shall hunger. Woe to you that now laugh; for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when men shall bless you*. [Lk 6.24-26]

The Lord says: *Woe!* whereas you false prophets say: *Go up*. Beware of false prophets, then. Do not believe them, and go up to Ramoth Galaad; because there you will find woe.

**(A sermon against false religious: *Jeroboam said to his wife*. Here is something**

**about the hyena, its nature and significance.)**

4. There follows: *Who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves*. *What has Christ in common with Belial* [2Cor 6.15]? What has the sheep in common with the wolf? A sheep in clothing, but a wolf in mind. 'A pretended equity is no equity at all- it is just a double iniquity.'[2] False religious are ravening wolves coming in sheep's clothing. There is something similar in the third book of Kings, where:

*Jeroboam said to his wife: Arise, and change thy dress, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam. And go to Silo, where Ahias the prophet is... So when she was coming in, and made as if she were another woman, Ahias heard the sound of her feet coming in at the door, and said: Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam. Why dost thou feign thyself to be another*. [3(1)Kg 14.2,5-6]

Jeroboam means 'division of the people'. He is the false religious who, divided between sheep and wolf, sows division and discord in cloisters and chapters. He is like *Satan among the sons of God* [Job 1.6]. He is what the psalm calls, *the business that walketh about in the dark* [Ps 90.6]. His 'wife' is wolfish pleasure, which would like to change its dress to sheep-skin. But Ahias, the prophet of the Lord, knows her and says: *Come in*, etc. Ahias means 'seeking life', and he stands for the human conscience which ever cries out, and recognises every deceit. So the Apostle says to the Romans:

*Their conscience bearing witness to them; and their thoughts between themselves accusing or also defending one another.* [Rom 2.15]

And Solomon in Proverbs: *An evil man always seeketh quarrels: but a cruel angel shall be sent against him*, [Prov 17.11] that is, his conscience reproaching him.

Note that the hypocrite who hides under a sheep-skin is like the hyaena, of which many strange things are told. The hyaena is a small animal, living wild, digging up graves at night and eating the bodies of the dead. It can imitate the human voice, lurking around the shepherds' huts and, by careful listening, learning to make sounds that imitate the human voice, so as to savage at night someone who has let it in by mistake. It can counterfeit human vomiting, too, and by false gurglings it attracts dogs and then eats them. If they are hunting it, and come across its shadow in the chase, they lose their voice and cannot bark. The eyes of the hyaena are multi-coloured and changing, and they never blink, but maintain a fixed and unwavering gaze. There is no gum in their mouths, just a single, lasting tooth; which is naturally enclosed in the manner of little boxes, so that it is never blunted. If this hyaena goes round any animal three times, it cannot move itself. The Lord says of it through Jeremiah (in an alternative translation):

*My inheritance is become to me as an hyaena's den*. [Jer 12.8]

The hypocrite is an animal of this sort, living like a beast, small by his pretence, wild in the deformity of his action, digging up graves in the night of deceit. He creeps into the

house of women, as the Apostle says [2Tim 3.6], by pleasing speeches and good words seducing the hearts of the innocent [Rom 16.18], and so eats the corpses of sinners. He affects a human voice (that is, praise), lurking round the shepherds' huts, the places of preaching, so as to listen carefully and learn how to preach; then in the night he deceives men who associate with him by his preaching.

He counterfeits human vomit (the confession of sins). He accuses himself of being a sinner, but does not think he is. He draws men with false gurglings and groanings, so that they think he is a saint, seeing him groan like this! Sometimes he even deceives just men, too ready to believe in his false devotion. If his shadow touches anyone, they are unable to bark against him- they even defend him! In particular, this happens today with those who trust heretics. They really do not heed the Lord's advice: *Beware of false prophets*, etc.

The heretic's eyes are very shifty. Sometimes he raises his eyes to heaven and sighs, sometimes he casts them down and weeps. His colour is always changing: now he is pale, now he is dark, now he has ragged clothing, now well-ordered. Now abstinence pleases him, now it displeases. This constant change of colour indicates his inner instability.

Any animal that the hyaena (the heretic or hypocrite) goes round three times- encircling it with the word of preaching, with the example of a pretended holiness, and the appearance of attractive promise- remains immovable as regards good. *Beware*, then, I pray you, *of false prophets*. By their fruits you shall know them. The Gloss says, 'You can best tell them by their impatience in time of adversity.' When prosperity smiles, the wolfish mind is hidden beneath the sheep-skin; but when adversity gives a jaundiced look, the sheep-skin is torn by the wolf's teeth.

There follows: *Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?* Thorns pierce, sharp as spears; thistles choke. The thorns and thistles are heretics and hypocrites, from whom none of the wise can find holiness or truth; but they tear and wound those who go near them.

**(A moral sermon against false prophets, that is, the carnal affections: *Beware*; and: *Now all the prophets of Baal*, and the rest that follows.)**

5. *Beware of false prophets*, etc. The false prophets are the carnal affections which, to seduce the soul, set forth the frailty and weakness of nature, display the abundance of material things, and prophesy peace, preaching that God's mercy is great. They go on like this in order to soothe the soul. The just man says of them (weeping, in Jeremiah):

*Ah, ah, ah, O Lord God, the prophets say to them: You shall not see the sword, and there shall be no famine among you, but he will give you true peace in this place*. [Jer 14.13]

When the carnal affections talk like this, there is nothing left to do but groan and say: Ah, ah, ah, O Lord God. That threefold 'Ah' suggests a threefold sorrow, in the heart, in the mouth, and in the body. The Lord says of this to Ezekiel:

*Thou therefore, O son of man, prophesy and strike thy hands together:*

*and let the sword be doubled, and let the sword of the slain be tripled.*

*This is the sword of the great slaughter that maketh them stand amazed.* [Ezek 21.14]

When the just man hears the voice of the prophets, the bleating of the flocks and the muttering of carnal desires, he should clap his hands together at once, and double or triple the sword of sorrow, to slay the false prophets and amaze their appetite. Well does the Lord say: *Beware of false prophets.*

There is a **concordance** to this in the fourth book of Kings, where Jehu says:

*Now therefore call to me all the prophets of Baal, and all his servants and all his priests. Let none be wanting*. [4(2)Kg 10.19]

When they were gathered,

*Jehu commanded his soldiers and captains, saying: Go in, and kill them. Let none escape. And the soldiers and captains slew them with the edge of the sword... And brought the statue out of Baal's temple, and burnt it, and broke it in pieces. They destroyed also the temple of Baal, and made a jakes in its place unto this day. So Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel*. [4(2)Kg 10.25-28]

Jehu means 'commotion', and he stands for the just man who should be stirred up against himself in a fury of anger, when he sees himself put into temptation. He should gather together all the prophets of Baal, etc. Baal ('the devourer') is the belly, that devours everything and whose 'prophets' are carnal affections. The just man should gather them all together and kill them with the sword of penance.

*And they brought the statue out of the temple*, etc. Heathen error built temples (fanes) as places for spirits; and displayed the images of demons there. They are called 'fanes', from the Greek *phania,* meaning apparitions, that men spoke to. The 'fane' of Baal is gluttony, and images of fish and flesh are commonly exhibited in it. The just man should bring out the statue, the idol of concupiscence, burn it with hunger and thirst, and break it in pieces with all kinds of abstinence.

*They destroyed also the temple of Baal*. Such temples were places of eating and feasting. Eating means inordinate and uncontrolled greed, which should be destroyed altogether and made into a latrine. This 'privy place', set apart, represents the stink of

the belly, which we must provide for from necessity, not for pleasure. We reckon it a receptacle for dung that we must carry with us always, unhappy wretches that we are. When we remember this, it should make us humble. Micah says: *Thy humiliation shall be in the midst of thee* [Mic 6.14]. Our 'midst' is our belly, receptacle of dung, the thought of which is a reason for humility. Well said, then, *Beware of false prophets*.

6. The just man pleads to be freed from these prophets in the Introit of today's Mass:

*Behold, God is my helper: and the Lord is the protector of my soul.*

*Turn back the evils upon my enemies: and cut them off in thy truth;*

*O Lord my protector*. [Ps 53.6-7; 58.12]

God helps the just man when he gives him the grace to kill the prophets of Baal. He protects him when he brings the statue of concupiscence out of the temple of gluttony. He turns back evils on his enemies when he burns and breaks that statue with fasts and vigils. He cuts them off in truth when he entirely demolishes the temple of bad habit.

The first part of today's Epistle is **concordant** with this first clause:

*We are debtors not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you shall die: but if by the Spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live*. [Rom 8.12-13]

See how the Apostle here shows clearly how the false prophets of Baal are to be mortified. We are debtors not to the flesh, he says, but to the Holy Spirit who makes us live; not to the flesh from which comes death. We are strictly bound by duty to the Spirit, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh, according to fleshly pleasure, even though we must give it what is necessary. If we live according to the flesh, we are trusting in false prophets, and we shall die, because the ravening wolves will tear us to pieces. But if, by the Spirit, we mortify the deeds of the flesh, putting the prophets of Baal to the sword of penance, burning the statue and destroying the temple of Baal: without a doubt we shall live, by the life of grace now, and of glory in the future. May he graciously bring us there, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A sermon on the five things which are in a tree, and their meaning: *Every tree*.)**

7. There follows, secondly:

*Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree*

*that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them*. [Mt 7.17-20]

Note that there are these five things in the good tree: its root, its trunk, its branches, its leaves and its fruit. The roots go down deep into the earth, and spread out. Naturalists say that the depth of the roots is equal to the height of the tree. The trunk is the main part of the tree, rising from the roots. The branches spread out from the tree-trunk, and they are covered with the leaves and the fruit.

The good tree is good will, which requires five things if it is to stand and be good: the root of humility, the trunk of obedience, the branches of charity, the leaves of holy preaching and the sweet fruit of heavenly contemplation. The root of humility should as deep seated in the heart, as it is shown forth in good works. It signifies this by the water that goes up as much as it comes down. The humility of hypocrites, having no root in the heart, would like to appear great in works. But true humility abases itself the more deeply it is rooted, and so it is raised up the higher.

**(A sermon on the ten lines on the sundial, the degrees and their meaning: *Ezechias said to Isaias: What shall be the sign*.)**

8. And so, there is a **concordance** to this blessed root of the good tree in the fourth book of Kings, where:

*Ezechias said to Isaias: What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up to the temple of the Lord the third day? And Isaias said to him: This shall be the sign from the Lord, that the Lord will do the word which he hath spoken: Wilt thou that the shadow go forward ten lines, or that it go back so many degrees? And Ezechias said: It is an easy matter for the shadow to go forward ten lines; and I do not desire that this be done: but let it return back ten degrees. And Isaias the prophet called upon the Lord; and he brought the shadow ten degrees backwards by the lines, by which it had already gone down in the dial of Achaz*. [4(2)Kg 20.8-11]

The 'dial of Achaz' (meaning 'converted', or 'holding strength') is the humble heart of the penitent, who is converted from his evil way and holds on to the strength of perseverance, so as to receive the prize of glory. On this dial there are, and ought to be, ten degrees of humility, by which the sun (the soul enlightened by grace) should go up and return again.

The first degree of humility is to remember what vile and stinking material we are made of.

The second, is to recall how we were hidden for nine months in our mother's womb, and nourished with her blood. Of these two, you will find more in the Gospel: *A blind man sat* [Quinquagesima].

The third, how from the darkness of the womb we came out weeping and wailing, naked and unclean. Job went down by these three degrees, when he said:

*Who can make him clean that is conceived of unclean seed?* [Job 14.4]

and:

*Why did I not die in the womb? Why did I not perish when I came out of the belly?*

*Why received upon the knees? Why suckled at the breasts?* [Job 3.11-12]

and Jeremiah:

*Why came I out of the womb to see labour and sorrow,*

*and that my days should be spent in confusion?* [Jer 20.18]

The fourth degree is, how miserable and loathsome is this pilgrimage of exile, in which there is sorrow and groaning, anguish and weeping. So Jacob says in Genesis:

*The days of my pilgrimage are few and evil.* [Gen 47.9]

The fifth, to remember our own wickedness: what, and how great the things, we have done or left undone; how, when we were free, we sold ourselves to the devil for nothing; how ungrateful we have been to God. Of this degree, it is told in the fourth book of Kings, that

*Ezechias turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the Lord, and wept with much weeping.* [4(2)Kg 20.2-3]

The wall is the whole collection of his sins, towards which the sinner should turn and recognise, in bitterness of soul, how much he has done and left undone; and he should pray to God to restore the grace he has lost; and he should weep, that God may forgive his sins.

The sixth is the remembrance of death, bitterest thought of all. So Ecclesiasticus says:

*O death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that hath peace in his possessions*. [Ecclus 41.1]

In death, his flesh will be given to worms, his soul to demons (if he does not repent), and his property will be left to his children and kin. So the psalm says:

*They shall go into the lower parts of the earth:* (that is hell, their soul to the demons)

*they shall be delivered into the hands of the sword*; (death, their flesh to worms)

*they shall be the portion of foxes;* [Ps 62.10-11]

(their property to their families, who are like cunning foxes quarrelling over the skin of a dead donkey).

The seventh degree of humility is to recall to mind how the Son of God bowed his divine head in the womb of the poor little Virgin; how he who fills heaven and earth, "whom heaven and earth cannot contain, constricted himself in the chamber of one little maid,"[3] and dwelt there for nine months; how he was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger; how he was carried away from Herod's face into Egypt, the Lord of the whole world a refugee from the world! How in all the world he could not find a place to lay his head, except when, bowing his head upon his Father's breast, he committed his spirit into his hands.

The eighth, how great were his mercies and kindness to sinners, whom he drew to himself by the sweetness of his preaching; whom he ate with, to call them to repentance. How great was his compassion when he wept bitterly over the city in which he was to be crucified, and over Lazarus whom he was to raise! How great was his mildness, when he was willing to talk alone with the Samaritan woman, and allow the sinful Magdalene to touch him!

The ninth, how he was beaten with rods and blows, spat upon, crowned with a crown of thorns, given vinegar and gall to drink, and crucified between thieves, as if he was a thief himself.

The tenth degree is to ponder carefully in the mind how the trumpet shall sound, and as Daniel says:

*the dead that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake:*

*some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach, to see it always.* [Dan 12.2]

That is, to see how the humble man who was judged will come as a stern judge; the Son of a suppliant Virgin to judge the whole world in justice. They will see how the pillars of heaven will tremble at his nod, how the powers of heaven will be moved, and how the heavens will be folded up like a book, the sun being turned to darkness and the moon to blood. Men will go mad and say to the mountains: Fall on us; and to the hills: Hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne.

By these ten degrees the soul of the penitent should go up and down. By as much as

she goes down, by so much she shall rise. This will be the true sign that the Lord has healed her from every weakness of sin, and that she will go up into the temple of the heavenly Jerusalem, built of living stones. Blessed is that tree that has such a root, because it is from the root that the fruit of the tree springs. That is why we have treated of the thing by which humility is represented. From it the tree of good will arises, and man receives the fruit of eternal life. Well does the Lord say: *A good tree bringeth forth good fruit*.

**(A sermon on the five things which are in the bad tree: *A watcher and a holy one came down from heaven*.)**

9. There follows: *and an evil tree brings forth evil fruit*. The word for ‘evil’ (*malus, -a, -um*) is derived from the Greek *melan*, the black bile from which the melancholic temperament gets its name. This drives men to avoid human company, because of an excess of black bile. The evil tree is the evil will. Its root is cupidity, its trunk is obstinacy, its branches are evil works, its leaves are poisonous words, and its fruit is eternal death. Of a tree like this the Lord says:

*Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down, and shall be cast in the fire.*

So it says in Daniel that:

*A watcher and a holy one came down from heaven. He cried aloud, and said thus: Cut down the tree and chop off the branches thereof: shake off its leaves and scatter its fruits; let the beasts fly away that are under it and the birds from its branches.* [Dan 4.10-11]

The tree is cut down when the sinner, cut down by death’s axe, falls to earth and returns to it. Then the branches of riches and temporal honours are chopped off, and the leaves of frivolous words are shaken off. "Words now must go, the mighty wind doth blow."[4] The fruit, his evil deeds, are scattered, because the gates of the body, through which the wretch used to go out to see the women of the country [cf. Gen 34.1], are now shut. The beasts that roam the waste, robbers and murderers, that use to take refuge under his shade, flee when he is dead. The birds, the proud, who used to live in his branches, fly away. The Lord says well: *Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down, and shall be cast in the fire prepared for the devil and his angels*.

Isaiah says:

*Topheth is prepared from yesterday, prepared by the king, deep and wide. The nourishment thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord is a torrent of brimstone kindling it*. [Is 30.33]

Topheth (meaning ‘width’) is Hell, which will stretch out his soul endlessly. It is prepared from ‘yesterday’, that is, from eternity, by Jesus Christ the king, to whom all the past is

present, to whom what he did from eternity is as yesterday is to us. This Hell is called deep and wide. It is deep- indeed bottomless- without end of punishment. It is wide, to receive the souls of the damned. Hell it is called, and souls are carried down thither. Its nourishment is much wood, the souls of sinners; the breath of the Lord (his anger), like a torrent of brimstone, burning and stinking, will kindle it. Whoever burns here with the fire of avarice, and is defiled with the stink of lust, will burn there for ever.

10. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause:

*Whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear; but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father).* [Rom 8.14-15]

The Spirit of God is humility, and those led by it, and ruled by it, are truly the good tree, because they are the sons of God. As the root supports the tree, so humility supports the soul. The spirit of humility is sweeter than honey, and those who are ruled by it produce sweet fruits. You have not received the spirit of bondage, which makes men serve unwilling, from fear of punishment, 'again'- that is, as before under the Law. The evil tree does not receive the spirit of adoption, of sons, but the spirit of bondage, as slaves who *do not remain in the house for ever* [Jn 8.35], but are cut down and cast into the fire that never ends.

Adoption is when someone is given the status of a son. The adoptive son, accepted into the place of a son, Jesus Christ, the ever-blessed, makes the barren tree a good and fruitful tree, by grafting on the shoot of faith. Every day, he makes sons of wrath become sons of grace; so in contrition of heart and confession of the mouth they cry out daily: *Abba, Father*. 'Abba' is the Syrian and Hebrew for 'Father' (Latin and Greek '*Pater*'). In this double naming of fatherhood, there is represented a double mercy of fatherly kindness. The penitent, received in the place of a son, should hope for remission of sins and the blessing of glory.

We pray you, then, Abba, Father, to make us a good tree, granting that we may produce fruit worthy of penitence; so, rooted and founded in humility, and freed from the eternal fire, we may deserve to pluck the fruit of eternal life. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A sermon against those who, being in mortal sin, cry out to the Lord*: He calleth to me out of Seir*.)**

11. There follows, thirdly:

*Not everyone that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of*

*heaven.* [Mt 7.21]

The expression, 'Lord', has several connotations: it indicates dominion over all creation; or headship of a household; or the power to threaten. The Gloss comments on this text of the Gospel, 'The way to the kingdom of God is by obedience, not empty words. One does not truly and properly 'say', if what one professes is in disagreement with one's intention. The Apostle says:

*No man can say: The Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost*. [1Cor 12.3]

To say truly, Lord Jesus, is to believe with one's heart, confess with one's mouth, and attest by one's deeds. To have one without the other is a denial.' However much their tongue resounds with praises, their life blasphemes. They cry 'Lord', but they are not his servants and they do not fear his threats.

So he himself says in Isaiah:

*He calleth to me out of Seir:*

*Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?*

*The watchman said:*

*The morning cometh, also the night. If you seek, seek: return, come.* [Is 21.11-12]

Seir means 'bristly', and it stands for sinners who bristle with the thorns of riches and cares. Genesis says that Esau dwelt in the land of Seir, the region of Edom [Gen 36.8]. Esau, note, was called both 'Seir' and 'Edom': Seir, because he was hairy, Edom on account of the red broth for which he sold his birthright. Esau means 'heap of stones', and Edom, 'blood'. Where there is a heap of stones (riches), there will be the piercing thorns of care. And where there is care, there blood will flow. The sinner cries from Seir, *Watchman, what of the night?* Behold, *A wheel within a wheel* [Ezek 1.16; 10.10].

In Matthew, the word 'Lord' is repeated, and in Isaiah the word 'watchman'. This indicates that he who is Lord must also be a watchman, so as to watch well over the house of which he is head. The double 'Lord' comprises Creator and Judge, and between these two extremes the middle term is 'watchman'. Jesus Christ was Lord in the creation of the world, and he will be Lord, too, in the strict assize of judgement; for a judge gives to each what is just. Between these two he is watchman of the night. The Lord took the form of a servant, to watch over his servants. So it says in Luke *that he passed the whole night in the prayer of God* [Lk 6.12]. The night-watchman passed the night in prayer, not for himself but for his creatures, whom he had come to set free.

He was a night-watchman, too, in the Passion. Luke says: And he was withdrawn away

from them a stone's cast. And kneeling down he prayed [Lk 22.41]. He prayed alone for all, who was to suffer alone for all. St Ambrose[5] says: "He wept over me, because he had nothing to weep over in himself." He knelt, so that the disposition of his body might show the humility of his mind. Truly, he was humble then: but he will come in severity to lay waste the earth and eradicate the wicked from it.

**(A sermon against gluttony, pride, vainglory and lust: *They were filled and were made full*.)**

12. He himself complains of them in the prophet Hosea:

*They were filled and were made full:*

*and they lifted up their heart and have forgotten me.*

*And I will be to them as a lioness,*

*as a leopard in the way of the Assyrians.*

*I will meet them as a bear that is robbed of her whelps*

*and I will rend the inner parts of their liver:*

*and I will devour them there as a lion. The beast of the field shall tear them.*

*Destruction is thy own, O Israel: thy help is only in me*. [Hos 13.6-9]

Eight things are mentioned in this text: four vices and four punishments corresponding to each. *They were filled* indicates riches and avarice. *And were made full* indicates gluttony. *They lifted up their heart* indicates pride and vainglory. *And have forgotten me* indicates lust.

So it says in Ezekiel:

*Because thou hast forgotten me and hast cast me off behind thy back,*

*bear thou also thy wickedness and thy fornications.* [Ezek 23.35]

Someone casts the Lord behind his back when he forgets the bitterness of his Passion and turns to the pleasures of the flesh, from love of which he becomes a slave to gluttony and the belly. And I will be to them as a lioness, says the Lord against the 'filled'; as a leopard in the way of the Assyrians I will meet them, against those 'made full'; as a bear that is robbed of her whelps I will rend the inner parts of their liver,

meaning the proud who lift up their hearts. We love with our liver, and so it stands for love of earthly things. If anyone loves them, the Lord will tear out his entrails. And I will devour them (the lustful) there as a lion, because the beast of the field (the devil) shall tear them with the sword of eternal death, so that the one who incited them to guilt will also execute their punishment. Destruction is thy own, O Israel, as though to say, If you are destroyed, it is your own fault. But your help is in the end only from me, no one else, because I keep watch over Israel. He says well, then, *Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?*

There follows: *The watchman said: The morning cometh, also the night. If you seek, seek: return, come*. A watchman takes care; and the word for morning resembles an ancient term for 'good': what is better than light? The Lord, our watchman, *who hath care of us*, as Peter says [1Pt 5.7], replies to those who say, 'Lord, Lord': 'The morning comes', the illumination of grace. Walk, then, while it is day, because the night is coming when no-one can work. Solomon says: *If the tree fall to the south* (life), *or to the north* (death), *in what place soever it shall fall, there shall it be* [Eccles 11.3]. Work promptly, then, while it is morning; because there is neither work nor reason in hell, whither you are hasting, O sinner, driven by your sins. If you seek, if you mean to seek, seek while it is morning. If you do seek, what is this seeking? *Return*, he says, *and come*. See how the Lord is sought and found. The Lord is not to be sought in words- 'Lord, Lord'- because he seeks worshippers who will worship him in spirit and in truth, in the spirit of contrition and in the truth of confession.

**(A sermon how anyone should seek the Lord: *When Josias heard the word of the Law of the Lord*.)**

13. In this way that holy Josias, king of Judah, sought the Lord; of whom there is a **concordance** in the fourth book of Kings, where it says that

*when Josias had heard the words of the law of the Lord, he rent his garments...*

*and he made a covenant with the Lord, to walk after the Lord...*

*with all their heart and with all their soul...*

*and he cast out of the temple of the Lord all the vessels that had been made for Baal, ...*

*and he burnt them without Jerusalem in the valley of Cedron. ...*

*And he burnt the chariots of the sun with fire...*

*moreover the diviners by spirits, and soothsayers, and the figures of idols,*

*and the uncleannesses, and the abominations... Josias took away...*

*and he made a Passover to the Lord*. [4(2)Kg 22.11; 23.3,4,11,24]

Josias means ‘one in whom is sacrifice’, and he stands for the penitent, in whom there is a sacrifice to the Lord, a contrite spirit. When he hears of the everlasting glory of the just, and the unending punishment of sinners, he rends his garments: that is, he afflicts his body, with which his soul is clothed, and makes a covenant with the Lord, that the Lord will forgive his sins, and he himself will never return to them. And he casts out of the Lord’s temple, his heart, in which the Lord dwells, all the vessels which were made for Baal: all manner of greed whereby he served the god Baal, his belly; and he burns them in the valley of Cedron (meaning, ‘sadness and grief’). He burns with the fire of penitence the chariots of the sun: the five bodily senses which turn on four wheels, temporal pleasure around the four seasons, and run hither and thither in the sun, the brightness of passing glory. He takes away those who divine by the spirit of avarice, and the soothsayers who chant their prayers at the altars of wickedness- the hypocrites. Also the figures of idols, the imagining of lewd thoughts; the uncleannesses of fornication; and the abominations of words. When all these have been cleansed, he makes a Passover to the Lord, passing from vice to virtue, so as to be converted to the Lord and to follow him: not saying, ‘Lord, Lord’, but doing the will of the Father, so as to deserve at the last to enter his kingdom.

14. Note. The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this third clause:

*The Spirit himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God. And if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ*. [Rom 8.16-17]

If, being converted, we follow the Lord, and cleanse the temple of the Lord from all impurity, we shall know very well that the Spirit of God bears testimony of good hope to our spirit, and that we are children of God doing the will of our Father in heaven. If we are his children, we are his heirs too. We share the same glory, heirs indeed of God, who has made us heirs of an eternal inheritance by the testament confirmed by the blood and death of his Son. We are joint heirs with him, because he is our flesh and our brother [cf. Gen 32.27], by a sharing our nature. He raised it in heaven above the angels, "to make us sharers in his divinity"[6] , and joint heirs.

Let us pray, then, dearest brothers, to the almighty Father: that he would grant us to do his will, to purify the temple of our heart from all uncleanness, and to celebrate the true Passover; that we may be made fit to come to the eternal heritage he has promised us through our joint heir, Jesus Christ his beloved Son. May he grant this, who with his most dear Son and the Holy Spirit is one eternal God, living and reigning for ever and ever. Let the whole Church say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] BERNARD, *De consideratione*, IV,6,20: PL 182.786

[2] AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in psalmos*, Ps 63.11; PL 36.765

[3] *BREVIARIUM ROMANUM*, Christmas Day Matins, *Responsorium* 6.

[4] *BREVIARIUM ROMANUM*, 13th December, St Lucy, 5th Lesson.

[5] *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Lk 22.42

[6] *MISSALE ROMANUM*, Preface for the Ascension

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

[PROLOGUE FOR AUGUST]

We give thanks, unworthy though we are, to the Triune God, by the help of whose grace we have, as best we could, reached the first Sunday in August in our course on the Sunday Gospels. Note then that from the first of August until the first of September the five books of Solomon are read in the Church: namely Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Canticle of canticles, the book of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus. There are four Sundays in the month of August, and with God's help we shall **concord** with their Gospels such parts of these five books as we shall consider most useful for edification, and most suitable for the matters treated.

## NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the ninth Sunday after Pentecost: *There was a certain rich man who had a steward*, which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon on knowledge, on the life of the prelate or preacher of the Church, and on the properties of milk: *He that strongly squeezeth the paps*.)**

1. At that time: Jesus said to his disciples: *There was a certain rich man who had a steward; and the same was accused unto him, that he had wasted his goods*. [Lk 16.1]

Solomon says in Proverbs:

*He that strongly squeezeth the paps to bring out milk straineth out butter: and he that draineth violently bringeth out blood*. [Prov 30.33]

{We squeeze the paps strongly when we consider the sacred words with a subtle mind; by doing so, though we seek milk, we get butter: for while we are looking to be nourished with a meagre understanding, we are given inwardly something much richer. He who drains violently brings out blood: we need to be careful lest trying too hard to get milk from the udders, we draw blood. Squeezing too hard and drawing blood means that too much discussion may produce a carnal understanding rather than a spiritual: he that draineth violently bringeth out blood.}[1] Note these four: the paps, the milk, the butter and the blood. The paps are the Old and New Testaments, the milk is allegory, the butter morality, and the blood sorrow leading to tears.

Regarding the breasts of the Old and New Testaments, Hosea says:

*Give them, O Lord. What wilt thou give them?*

*Give them a womb without children and dry breasts*. [Hos 9.14]

The Lord gives perverse prelates and preachers of the Church a womb without children. Their mind is not made pregnant by the Holy Spirit, and so they remain barren of good works, lacking offspring. Their breasts, the knowledge of the two Testaments, are dry and unfruitful. So Solomon says in Proverbs:

*Where there are no oxen, the crib is empty:*

*but where there is much corn, there the strength of the ox is manifest*. [Prov 14.4]

The crib, (strictly, 'an enclosure') here means the congregation of the faithful, which the Lord encloses with a hedge of faith. It is empty, because the oxen (the prelates) are not living where their office requires. If they were there in the strength of good works, where they are by rank and dignity, there would undoubtedly be much corn (works of virtue) in the congregation of the faithful. So Solomon says well: *He that strongly squeezeth the paps*, etc.

He squeezes the paps strongly, who puts the hand of action to the knowledge of both Testaments which he preaches; otherwise the same objection may be made that Solomon says in Proverbs:

*The slothful hideth his hand under his armpit:*

*and it grieveth him to turn it to his mouth*. [Prov 26.15]

The armpits, beneath the arms, are the places from which the arms move. Someone puts his hands under his armpits, and will not turn them to his mouth, if he fails to apply the hand of action to what his mouth preaches.

The preacher, then, must draw from the breasts the milk of history, so that he may derive from it the delicious butter of morality. Note that milk is made up of three elements. First there is the watery matter, the 'whey'. Second, the curds from which cheese is made. The third is butter. The whey is the historical meaning, the cheese is allegory, the butter is morality. The tastier this last is, the more it is relished by the minds of those who hear it, because their practice is undermined. Therefore, we should stick more to morality, which instructs behaviour, than to allegory which instructs faith; for by God's grace the faith is spread all over the world.

There follows: *and he that draineth violently bringeth out blood*. Blood fosters growth,

and nourishes, and it is sweet. It stands for compunction of tears, which sustains the soul and makes it grow, so that it does not fall into sin. What is sweeter than tears, flowing from the sweetness of contemplation? "Tears are the life-blood of the soul," says St Augustine[2] . Tears come from the tearing of the mind. When the sinner is squeezed violently by the word of preaching, that draws his mind above, he sheds blood (that is, tears) because he has wasted the goods the Lord had committed to him. Hence it says in today's Gospel, *There was a certain rich man who had a steward*, etc.

2. There are three points to note in this Gospel. The first is the accusation of the steward to his master, and the wasting of his goods, where it begins: There was a man. The second is the calling together of the debtors, when it goes on: Therefore calling together every debtor. The third is the reception of the poor who do good into the everlasting dwellings, as it ends: *And I say to you: make unto you friends*, etc. We shall **concord** with these three clauses of the holy Gospel some of the Proverbs of Solomon.

In the Introit of today's Mass we sing: *When I cried to the Lord*. The Epistle of blessed Paul to the Corinthians is read: *Let us not covet evil things*, which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the three clauses of the Gospel. The first part is: *Let us not covet*. The second is: *Wherefore he that thinketh himself to stand*. The third is*: And God is faithful*, etc.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A theme for the Advent of the Lord: *Length of days is in his right hand*.)**

3. Let us say, then:

*There was a certain rich man who had a steward; and the same was accused unto him, that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said to him: How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship, for now thou canst be steward no longer. And the steward said within himself: What shall I do, because my lord taketh away from me the stewardship? To dig I am not able; to beg I am ashamed. I know what I will do, that when I shall be removed from the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses*. [Lk 16.1-4]

In this first clause we must first look very carefully at the meaning of the rich man, the steward, the wasting of the lord's goods, to dig and to beg. The rich man is Jesus Christ: 'man' because of his humanity, 'rich' because of his divinity. So Solomon says of him in Proverbs:

*The rich and poor have met together: the Lord is the maker of them both*. [Prov 22.2]

The poor man (human nature) and the rich (divine nature) are joined in Christ, that the poor man, bound by punishment and guilt, might be set free.

Proverbs says of the riches of this rich man:

*Length of days is in his right hand: and in his left hand riches and glory.*

*His ways are beautiful ways: and all his paths are peaceable*. [Prov 3.16-17]

The right hand is that which gives, the left is that which lets go. The left and right hands of Jesus Christ are his two Advents. The first is denoted by the left hand, the second by the right. In the first, Christ had the riches of poverty and humility, which he displayed in our market-places for us to buy, for without them we cannot be rich. He displayed also the glory which is joy in tribulation and patience in persecution. The Apostles came to these markets, and there were enriched with wonderful merchandise, as *they went forth from the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus*. [Ac 5.41]

There is a **concordance** to this in Proverbs:

*It is nought, it is nought, saith every buyer:*

*and when he is gone away then he will boast*. [Prov 20.14]

If you mean to go to the market of tribulation, where true riches are sold, first see if you have in your heart's purse the coin of patience and joy, to buy there. If not, I advise you not to go: you will come back empty-handed. If you are confident about the price, go and buy. You will not care if these riches are hard to get, if it is bitter to drink from the cup of tribulation. When you come back you will rejoice, because you will pass from the left hand to the right, wherein is length of days. It is said:

*I will fill him with length of days*. [Ps 90.16]

There follows: *His ways are beautiful ways*, etc. Note that Jesus Christ has two ways and two paths. The first way was from his Father to his mother, and this way is called charity, of which the prophet says: *Conduct me, O Lord, in thy way*, etc. [Ps 85.11]. The second way was from his mother into the world, and this is called humility, of which the Psalm says: *Thy way is in the sea* [Ps 76.20]; as if to say: O Christ, you were made the way of humility in Mary. Her name resembles 'marine', and she is called 'Star of the sea'.

These ways are beautiful. Of the first, the psalm says:

*With thy comeliness and thy beauty set out: proceed prosperously and reign*. [Ps 44.5]

O Word that the Father's heart has uttered, set out prosperously for the freeing of the human race, proceed to take on human nature, conquer the devil and reign. Say:

*All power is given to me in heaven and in earth*. [Mt 28.18]

Do all this in the beauty of your charity, with which you drive out the leprosy of our sin. Of the beauty of the second way, Canticles says:

*How beautiful are thy steps in shoes, O prince's daughter!* [Cant 7.1]

The mother and daughter of the prince, Jesus Christ, was blessed Mary. Her steps (the affections of her mind) were beautiful in shoes of blue, the desires of heavenly glory. So Ezekiel says:

*I shod thee with violet-coloured shoes*, [Ezek 16.10]

that is, desire for heavenly things; and Judith, in the book named after her, put sandals on her feet [Jud 10.3]. Judith means 'confessing', and she represents blessed Mary, who confessed to the Lord, saying, *My soul doth magnify the Lord* [Lk 1.46]. She put the sandals of heavenly desires upon the feet of her affections.

The first path of Jesus Christ was his persecution by the Jews; the second was the gibbet of the Cross. A path is a lesser way, a by-way. These ways were peacable, that is, making peace for us. As Isaiah says:

*The discipline of our peace was upon him: and by his bruises we are healed*. [Is 53.5]

Discipline brings learning to fulfilment. The Son of God underwent the discipline of the Passion, that by his blood he might make peace between heaven and earth [cf. Col 1.20], reconciling the human race to God the Father. Consider, wretched man, how great was the discord between you and God the Father, that you could never be reconciled to him except by the discipline of his Son. Think, sinner, how serious were your wounds, which could not be healed except by the wounds of Jesus Christ. Because your wounds were deadly- to eternal death- the Son of God died for you. "Pain is the medicine for pain."[3] So do not, I beg you, be ungrateful to the Rich Man, the Son of God and man, who healed your wounds with his wounds, and when you were dead brought you to life again by his death; who made you steward of his goods, to look after them and not to waste them. Yet, because you were not afraid to waste them, you must give an account.

And so the Gospel begins fittingly: *There was a certain rich man who had a steward; and the same was accused unto him, that he had wasted his goods*, etc. The steward was, originally, the 'sty-ward', but her it means the administrator or manager who manages the whole estate. This steward is Everyman, to whom God has given three gifts: of grace, of nature, and of temporal possessions. But this unhappy man wastes those of grace and nature by sinning mortally; and temporal goods by gathering them badly and not spending them well.

**(A theme against carnal and worldly people: *By three things the earth is disturbed*.)**

4. Regarding the manner of this wastage, there is a **concordance** in the Proverbs of Solomon:

*By three things the earth is disturbed, and the fourth it cannot bear:*

*By a slave when he reigneth: by a fool when he is filled with meat:*

*by an odious woman when she is married:*

*and by a bondwoman when she is heir to her mistress*. [Prov 30.21-23]

The surface of the earth is worn away, and it stands for the human mind which is turned over by many and various thoughts, its dust is blown away, and being blown away is despoiled of grace and wounded in nature. It is disturbed, then, by the fourfold curse that follows:

The servant reigning is the recalcitrant body, of which Ecclesiasticus says:

*Fodder, and a wand and a burden are for an ass;*

*bread and correction and work for a slave.*

*He worketh under correction and seeketh to rest:*

*let his hands be idle, and he seeketh liberty.*

*The yoke and the thong bend a stiff neck:*

*and continual labours bow a slave.*

*Torture and fetters are for a malicious slave:*

*send him to work, that he be not idle;*

*for idleness hath taught much evil.*

*Set him to work: for so it is fit for him.*

*And if he be not obedient, bring him down with fetters*. [Ecclus 33.25-30]

But because discretion in bodily affliction is very necessary, there follows immediately:

*Do no grievous thing without judgement.*

*If thou have a faithful slave,*

*a good and sensible one, flesh which does not trouble you,*

*let him be to thee as thy own soul: treat him as a brother*. [Ecclus 33.30-31]

*A fool when he is filled with meat*. The 'fool' is the senseless soul, drunk with pleasure, of whom Proverbs says*: The wicked man being scourged, the fool shall be wiser* [Prov 19.25]. When the body (the wicked man) is scourged, in the same measure the soul (the fool) becomes wiser, carried away by tears rather than by pleasures.

In the same book it says:

*Folly is bound up in the heart of a child:*

*and the rod of correction shall drive it away*. [Prov 22.15]

The child is the body, acting childishly, looking for the fruit and flowers of temporal things; it is bound in its heart by foolishness, the love of temporal things, which the rod of penance drives away. The proud heart should be like the savage lion: when it sees its cub being beaten, it is terrified of suffering the same, and puts away its fierceness. In the same way, if the body is struck with the rod of abstinence, the lion-like soul is humbled.

*By an odious woman when she is married*. Here 'woman', the 'weaker sex', stands for straying thoughts. These are 'odious' when they lead to the consent of the mind, and 'married' when they give rise to external action.

*By a bondwoman when she is heir to her mistress*. The mistress is reason, the bondwoman is sensuality; which even the earth cannot bear when it usurps the dominance of reason.

With this cursed quartet the ungrateful steward wastes the goods of his lord, and so is accused to him. As the Gloss says, this accusation is made when he fails to perform works of piety towards those he owes them to.

5. There follows: *And he called him*. The Lord calls his steward when he strikes him with the fear of eternal damnation. *And he said to him: How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship*. In other words, while you are alive, think how you should behave. Solomon says in Proverbs:

*He that tilleth his ground shall be filled with bread:*

*but he that followeth idleness shall be filled with poverty*. [Prov 28.19]

He will be filled with the bread of grace in this world, and of glory in the future, if he exercises the land of his body in good works. He who follows idleness, bodily pleasure, will be filled with the poverty of eternal death. For now thou canst be steward no longer: that is, from the time of your death.

*And the steward said within himself, being utterly terrified: What shall I do, because my lord taketh away from me the stewardship? To dig I am not able*, etc. When the sinner sees that all his temporal goods, together with life itself, are ending, he stirs himself to gain friends rather than to gather riches. He knows that when life is over there will be no chance to dig the ground of his soul with furrows of devout compunction, that it may bear fruit. He knows, too, that begging would be shameful, for the same reason that the foolish virgins begged. So Solomon says:

*Because of the cold, the sluggard would not plough:*

*he shall beg therefore in the summer, and it shall not be given him*. [Prov 20.4]

He would not plough (do penance) in the winter of this present life. Men used to plough with bronze plough-shares, and bronze, hard and resounding, stands for constant and and self-accusing penance, with which our ancient fathers used to plough their flesh. Our moderns plough now not with bronze, but dry wood, and almost nobody does real penance. That is why they will beg in the summer, at the general resurrection: *Lord, Lord, open to us!* And they will not be given life, but rather: *Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!*

6. The first part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this first clause:

*Let us not covet evil things as they also coveted. Neither become ye idolaters, as some of them, as it is written: The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed fornication, and thee fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ: as some of them tempted, and perished by the serpents. Neither do you murmur: as some of them murmured, and were destroyed by the destroyer*. [1Cor 10.6-10]

There are four things to note specially here: idolatry, fornication, tempting and murmuring; whereby the goods of the rich man are wasted. These four are **concordant** to the previous four.

He who loves his malicious servant, the body, not according to necessity but for pleasure, is like an idolater worshipping an idol. As it is written in Exodus: *the people sat*

*down to eat and drink* before the golden calf, *and rose up to play*, to worship it or to hold games in its honour.

When the fool stuffs himself with food he defiles himself with fornication, as we read in Numbers, when Israel committed fornication with the daughters of Moab, who called them to their sacrifices and they ate idolatrous food. And the Lord was angry, and there were slain in one day twenty three thousand [cf. Num 25.1-2,4,9]. See how fornication springs from gluttony, and from fornication comes death and destruction.

He who marries the odious woman, by the consent of mind and deed, tempts Christ: obeying his own will rather than Christ's, he confesses him only in words. Christ briefly includes these three in the words*: Whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her* (the odious woman) *hath already committed adultery with her in his heart* [Mt 5.28] (she is already married), and so is liable to be bitten by the serpents (the demons).

He who makes the bondmaid (sensuality) mistress over reason, stirs up murmuring and dissension in the household of his mind.

Let us therefore ask the Lord to destroy these four vices with four virtues; and to make firm the ground of our mind; and to keep his goods in us so that they be not wasted, but that we may be found fit to attain their full possession. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

**(A theme for a moral sermon against carnal prelates of the Church, and on the nature of the eagle and the bear, and the properties of the vulture: *There was a certain rich man who had a steward*.)**

7. *There was a certain rich man who had a steward*, etc. This steward is the prelate to whom the Lord has committed his estate, the Church, to take care of it. Solomon says to him in Proverbs:

*Be diligent to know the countenance of thy cattle: and consider thy own flocks.*

*For thou shalt not always have power:*

*but a crown shall be given thee to generation and generation*. [Prov 27.23-24]

O prelate, be diligent to know the countenance of your cattle, those subject to you, whether they have the 'Tau' of the Lord's Passion upon their foreheads, which they received in Baptism; or whether they have erased it and written over it the mark of the Beast [cf. Apoc 13.16]. Consider your flock, lest any one be infected by the disease of heresy or schism, and so infect others. As it says in the same book:

*Run about, make haste, stir up thy friend.*

*Give not sleep to thy eyes, neither let thy eye-lids slumber*. [Prov 6.3-4]

You will not always have the power, but only now. If you keep good watch, guarding your flock, you will be given a crown for ever and ever. That is how the steward should guard his lord's estate.

But alas, alas! I do not call him a steward, I call him a thief and a wolf, who wastes his lord's estate and eats up the goods entrusted to him. Solomon tells in Proverbs how the Church is wasted by the malice of prelates:

*By three things the earth is disturbed, and the fourth it cannot bear:*

*By a slave when he reigneth: by a fool when he is filled with meat:*

*by an odious woman when she is married:*

*and by a bondwoman when she is heir to her mistress*. [Prov 30.21-23]

The earth, which the Lord has blessed, is Holy Church, of which Genesis says: *Let the earth bring forth grass*, etc. [Gen 1.11]. See the sermon: *In the beginning God created heaven and earth* [Septuagesima]. This earth, the congregation of the faithful, is disturbed from its firm faith and holy life by the bad example of prelates.

*By a slave when he reigneth*. The slave reigning is the prelate who is a slave to sin, lifted up by the spirit of pride, the 'ape on the roof'[4] who presides over the people of God. Solomon says of him in Proverbs:

*As a roaring lion, and a hungry bear, so is a wicked prince over the poor people*. [Prov 28.15]

The prelate of the Church, the slave reigning, the wicked prince, is a roaring lion by his pride, and a hungry bear by his rapacity, robbing the poor people. But note that this wicked man is more cruel than a bear. Natural History says that the nature of the eagle and the bear is such that they never hunt in the place they have made their nest or den. Wicked servant, at least spare your own, where you have chosen to make your foul nest and your blind den!

This slave behaves towards his subjects like a vulture towards his chicks. Natural History says that the vulture casts out its chicks before they are able to fly, and does this out of envy towards the chicks, because it is naturally envious. It is very hungry, and when it is hungry it seizes much, and envies the chicks which are getting fat. The vulture flies

slowly, having a heavy body, and not being able to fly swiftly. It represents the prelate of the Church who, being impeded by temporalities, is unable to fly from earthly to heavenly things. He casts out his subjects by the bad example of his life. Before they are able to fly- that is, to despise the world and love heavenly things- he throws them out of the nest of faith and good intention. Alas! How many, because of the bad example of prelates, despise the nest of faith (of which Job says: *I shall die in my nest* [Job 29.18]) and are converted to the heretics! And because *by the envy of the devil death came into the world* [Wisd 2.24], he envies those subject to him, his parishioners, when he sees them achieving prosperity and abundance. "The envious man grows thin on another man's plenty."[5] If he is tortured by the happiness of his own people, whose happiness will he desire? Whose happy outcome can he rejoice in? He that is evil to his own, how will he be good to others? [cf. Ecclus 14.5]. By such a slave, then, the Church of Jesus Christ is wasted.

It is disturbed, too, *by a fool when he is filled with meat*. The fool filled with meat is the gluttonous and lustful prelate of the Church, of whom Proverbs says:

*He that loveth wine and fat things shall not be rich*, [Prov 21.17]

(rich with spiritual goods, that is). Solomon says to him, again in Proverbs:

*Give not to kings, O Lamuel, give not wine to kings:*

*because there is no secret where drunkenness reigneth:*

*and lest they drink and forget judgements (or benefits),*

*and pervert the cause of the children of the poor*.[Prov 31.4-5]

Lamuel means 'in whom is God', and he stands for the prelate, in whom God is in virtue of the dignity of his office; and would that it were so by the holiness of his life! He is twice told, to make him remember it more firmly, Give not, give not wine to kings. The kings are all the faithful, members of the King most high. O prelate, do not give them wine, standing for gluttony and lust; do not corrupt them by your bad example. Do not, I say, give them wine; because where such drunkenness reigns, whether in prelate or subject, there is no secret of chastity or purity. Do not, I say, give them wine, lest by your bad example of drunkenness they forget the judgements of God, and by judging unjustly pervert the cause of the children of the poor, who seek justice for themselves. When the head is sick, all the members feel pain. When the root dries up, so do the branches. So Proverbs says:

*When prophecy shall fail, the people shall be scattered abroad*. [Prov 29.18]

That is, when life and doctrine fail in prelates, the people forget the judgements of God,

and judge unjustly the cause of the poor. See how great is the ruin of the people, from the bad life of a prelate who is filled with food and forgets both God and the people entrusted to him. He behaves like the adulterous woman in Proverbs, who

*eateth and wipeth her mouth, and saith: I have done no evil*. [Prov 30.20]

So he, although he has done many evil things, wants to appear holy and just in the sight of men.

**(A theme against the simony of priests and prelates: *A foolish woman and clamorous*.)**

8. The Church is also wasted by *an odious woman when she is married*. This woman is the simony of prelates, which is ‘odious’ when it is promised, and ‘married’ when it is received. Of this woman, Solomon says in Proverbs:

*A foolish woman and clamorous, and full of allurements, and knowing nothing at all,*

*sat in the door of her house, upon a seat, in a high place of the city,*

*to call them that pass by the way, and go on their journey:*

*He that is a little one, let him turn to me.*

*And to the fool she said:*

*Stolen waters are sweeter, and hidden bread is more pleasant.*

*And he did not know that giants are there:*

*and that her guests are in the depths of hell*. [Prov 9.13-18]

Whoever makes application to her goes down to hell; but whoever shuns her will be saved.

Note that simony is called *A foolish woman and clamorous, and full of allurements, and knowing nothing at all*. A woman, because nearly everyone is seduced by her; foolish, because she sells gold for lead, what is spiritual for what is temporal; clamorous, because she shouts boldly in law-suits and courts; full of allurements, because she sells her own soul to buy her own shame; knowing nothing at all, and not understanding that God will not let such crime go unavenged. The simoniac’s money will go to hell with him, because he sold for money the gift of God which was given freely.

There follows: *She sat in the door of her house*, etc. The house of simony is the depraved will of the simoniac, and its doors are his hands and tongue, where simony is seated. Whoever sells or gives what is spiritual (or what is attached to something spiritual), by prayer or price, by word or gift, by promising or offering, out of fear or out of earthly or carnal love: he is a simoniac, and he cannot be saved unless he resigns and does true penance. Even the wicked willingness to buy or sell something spiritual makes a man a simoniac.

And because simony has chosen a greater place for herself, in the greater prelates of the Church, there is added: upon a seat, in a high place of the city. A city is like a world, and in old times it was circular. This city is the Church, 'round' in her perfection, and the Lord says to her: *Be perfect, as your Father is perfect* [cf. Mt 5.48]. The 'high place' of the Church is the dignity of prelature. So simony sits on a seat in the high place of the city, on those who occupy the chairs of ecclesiastical dignity. Because they love dignities, they lack followers; and so fall backwards off their stools and break their necks [cf. 1Kg(Sm) 4.18]. Woe to them, then, that freely take bribes and blind the eyes of the wise. They build Jerusalem in blood- that is, granting ecclesiastical benefices to their blood-relatives, nephews and great-nephews. It is a kind of sacrilege to give what belongs to the poor to those who are not poor. If you do give to your kinsman, you should give not because he is a kinsman, but because he is poor. Be careful not to put the patrimony of Jesus into the corbona, *because it is the price of blood* [Mt 27.6]. Do not give blood to blood, but give to the pilgrim and the poor man, for whose burial the price of the Lord's blood bought the field of Haceldama [cf. Mt 27.7-8], Holy Church, whose goods belong to the poor, not to the rich.

There follows: *to call them that pass by* , etc. Those who pass by, travelling on their journey, are penitent men who, having here no abiding city, lay down their burdens and run after Jesus, hastening to grasp the palm of the heavenly call. The foolish woman, sitting on high, calls them to turn in to her; but they, seeking not the glory that comes from man, but that which comes from God, utterly reject her blandishments. The small-minded and feeble-hearted, carnal folk who savour the flesh and glory in their shame, turn in to her to drink stolen water and to eat hidden bread. The stolen waters are benefices obtained by theft, simoniacally. The hidden bread is high dignity conferred, as it were hidden in darkness, on those who are blind in life and knowledge. These are all the sweeter and more savoury, the more they are gained with the burning thirst and hunger of cupidity. The unhappy wretches do not realize that giants (the demons) are there, in the dignities thus gained; and her simoniac guests are in the depths of hell, to be punished with the devil for ever. Those who seek to marry this odious woman go down to hell; those who shun her will be saved. It is well said, then, that the Church is wasted by simony.

**(Against those who pursue knowledge for the sake of money: *A bondwoman when she is heir*.)**

9. And it is disturbed by *a bondwoman when she is heir to her mistress*. The mistress is theology, the bondwoman is civil law and knowledge of money-making. Nowadays the

bondmaid is promoted above the mistress, Agar over Sara, civil law over divine law. Our modern prelates, disciples of Antichrist, not Christ, despise their lawful wife and are not ashamed to approach a concubine, who seeing herself pregnant, despises her mistress [cf. Gen 16.4]. In the episcopal courts they shout the law of Justinian, not that of Christ; the wicked tell fables: but not as thy law [Ps 118.85], Lord, which is now abandoned and hated. So it is necessary to cry out and say, as Sara did to Abraham:

*Thou dost unjustly with me; I gave my handmaid into thy bosom, and she, perceiving herself to be with child, despiseth me*. [Gen 16.5]

Abraham may pretend awhile, but the time will surely come when she says: Cast out the bondwoman and her son, and let the free woman alone have the inheritance. How wretched is he who busies himself with the law that judges temporal matters, and neglects the law by which he himself is judged! You will find more about this subject in the Gospel: *I am the good shepherd* [Easter II].

See now how the steward wastes the Lord's goods; how the malice of prelates destroys the Church, which says to her Spouse in today's Introit:

*When I cried to the Lord he heard my voice, from them that draw near to me:*

*He shall humble them, he who is before all ages and remains for ever.*

*Cast thy care upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee*. [cf.Ps 54.17-20,23]

Note these three: the hearing of the Church's cry, the casting out of false ministers, and the comforting of the Church. The Church, signed with the poverty of her Spouse in the midst of a wicked and perverse nation, which draws near to her in word but not in spirit, cries to the Lord to be freed from the oppression of this wicked nation. And the merciful Lord will free her, and humble to hell the perverse and sinful nation that calls itself a Church but is the synagogue of Satan [cf. Apoc 2.9], when he cleanses his threshing floor and gathers the wheat into his barn. He will burn the chaff (those who are now scattered abroad seeking the chaff of riches) in unquenchable fire. O poor little Church, buffeted by storms and without any comfort, *cast your care upon the Lord, for he will sustain you and you will be suckled at the breasts of kings*, as Isaiah says [cf. Is 60.16]. These kings are the Apostles, and their two breasts are the teaching of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit, which nurtured the Apostles and will nurture you until, at last, you will grow from strength to strength and see the God of gods in Sion [cf. Ps 83.8]. To him be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A theme for a sermon on the love of God and neighbour: *Therefore calling together every debtor*; and on the nature of oil and how the text, *The Spirit of God moved over the waters*, is to be understood in four ways.)**

10. There follows, secondly;

*Therefore calling together every one of his lord's debtors, he said to the first: How much dost thou owe my lord? But he said: An hundred barrels of oil. And he said to him: Take thy bill and sit down quickly and write fifty. Then he said to another: And how much dost thou owe? Who said: An hundred quarters of wheat. He said to him: Take thy bill and write eighty. And the lord commended the unjust steward, forasmuch as he had done wisely: for the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light*. [Lk 16.5-8]

The Gloss says here that the 'barrel' or amphora contained three 'jars'. The 'quarter' was thirty bushels. This may be taken simply thus: whoever relieves the needs of the poor by half or even a fifth, should be given the reward of his kindness.

Morally. Let us see what is meant by the two debtors, the hundred barrels of oil and the hundred quarters of wheat, the fifty and the eighty. These two debtors represent all the faithful, who are bound to observe the two precepts of charity, to love God and neighbour. The hundred barrels of oil denote the love of God, the hundred quarters of wheat love of neighbour. Note the reason why the oil signifies God's charity. Oil floats upon other liquids, and this is why: fatness comes not from water or earth, but from air; and so it floats on water, because the air in the oil carries it as though in a bottle, and that is its lightness. So the love of God should rise above every other love. Solomon says in Proverbs:

*The fruit of wisdom is better than all riches:*

*and all the things that are desired are not to be compared with her*. [Prov 3.14-15]

The fruit of wisdom is the love of God, and once its sweetness has been tasted, the soul knows how sweet the Lord is [cf. Ps 33.9]. What then is more precious? What more desirable? Neither wealth nor glory coming from things can compare. And as in oil there is nothing of water or earth, but only of air, so in God's love there can be mingled no carnality or earthiness, but only the air of a pure mind and heavenly behaviour. Blessed is that soul that has the love of God in her, because she floats on every water, being borne up by the 'air' that is in the loving soul.

11. So Genesis says: *The spirit of God moved over the waters* [Gen 1.2]. This text can be explained in four ways. The first is this: Just as the mind of a craftsman broods over the work he is going to do, and as the bird broods over the egg from which her young will be hatched, so the Spirit of God brooded over the waters, from which were to be made all the kinds of things, according to their kind.

The second is this: The Spirit of the Lord, meaning spiritual understanding, should be carried above the waters of carnal understanding. So John says: *It is the spirit that*

*quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing* [Jn 6.64], because *the letter killeth* (as Urias carried with him his own death-warrant, in the second book of Kings) *but the spirit giveth life* [2Cor 3.6]. Ezekiel says that the spirit of life was in the wheels [Ezek 1.20]. The spirit of life, spiritual understanding that gives life to the soul, is in the wheels of the Old and New Testaments. So in Proverbs:

*The law of the wise is a fountain of life, that he may decline from the ruin of death*. [Prov 13.14]

The third is this: The spirit of the Lord, that is, the spiritual prelate, moves over the waters, the peoples. "As the life of the shepherd should surpass the life of the sheep, so the life of the prelate should surpass that of those under him."[6] So Ezekiel says:

*Over the heads of the living creatures was the likeness of the firmament, as the appearance of crystal, terrible to behold, and stretched out over their heads above*. [Ezek 1.22]

The firmament is the prelate, in whom there should be the sun of a pure life, the moon of doctrine to light the night of our exile, and the stars of a good reputation. His behaviour should be like crystal, terrible to behold. ‘Crystal’ stands for constancy of mind and a kind and merciful disposition; ‘terrible’ indicates his severity in correcting. The prelate should be constant and kind, severe and terrible, as circumstances require; and thus he is borne upon the waters and upon the heads of the living creatures (his subjects, over whom he should stretch himself to protect and defend them).

The fourth is this: the spirit of the Lord is the soul which has already conceived the spirit of divine love, and is borne over the waters of temporal things. So Genesis says:

*The ark was carried on the waters. And the waters prevailed beyond measure upon the earth: and all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered*. [Gen 7.18-19]

The waters of riches and desires had so prevailed that they covered the whole earth. As Isaiah says:

*Their land is filled with silver and gold: and there is no end of their treasures* (AVARICE),

*and their land is filled with horses; and their chariots are innumerable* (PRIDE).

*Their land also is full of idols* (LUST). [Is 2.7-8]

The whole earth is covered with these accursed waters, and (what is worse and far more dangerous) so too are all the high mountains, the prelates of the Church, covered with these waters. But Noah’s Ark, the soul of the spiritual man, is carried upon the waters, because he regards them all as rubbish. It is well said, then, that the oil of divine love

floats on every liquid.

The hundred barrels of oil stand for the highest perfection of divine love. The steward, then, the prelate of the Church, should say to each of the faithful, who is in debt to God: *How much do you owe my lord?* that is: How much are you bound to love God? He should answer: *A hundred barrels of oil*; that is, I owe him all the perfection of love, because I am bound to love him with all my heart, and all my soul, and all my strength. But because I am a sinner, I am unable to attain that perfection. Then the Church's steward, looking ahead for both himself and for him, should say: *Take thy bill and sit down quickly, and write fifty*. The bill or account is the brief written record. Note these three, in which true penitence consists. The prelate or priest must say to the sinner: Because you cannot yet rise to the perfection of the highest love, meanwhile take your bill and prepare your life to do penance. Sit down quickly in heartfelt contrition, because the time is short. Write, by oral confession: fifty, in works of satisfaction. You will find more about the number fifty in the sermon: *When the day of Pentecost came round* [Pentecost].

**(A theme for prelates: *The likeness of the firmament*.)**

12. There follows: *Then he said to another: And how much dost thou owe? Who said: An hundred quarters of wh*eat, etc. The wheat is love of neighbour, of which Solomon says in Proverbs:

*He that hideth up corn shall be cursed among the people:*

*but a blessing upon the head of them that sell*. [Prov 11.26]

Whoever hides up corn- that is, withholds love from his neighbour- shall be cursed in the general assembly where all the people stand before the judgement seat. But a blessing- *Come, you blessed of my Father* [Mt 25.34]- on the head of those that sell. If you sell your neighbour the wheat of love, you will receive your reward in the eternal retribution. So Proverbs says:

*He that hath mercy on the poor lendeth to the Lord: and he will repay him*. [Prov 19.17]

The hundred quarters of wheat represent the perfection of inward love.

The steward, the priest or prelate of the Church, should say to the sinner, then: How much do you owe? that is, how much are you bound to love your neighbour, in God? He should reply: *An hundred quarters of wheat*; I am bound to love friend and foe, in God and for God's sake, and if needs be lay down my life for him. But because I am carnal and weak, I am unable to attain such love of neighbour. Then the steward should say to him: Though you cannot yet expose your life to death for your brother, in the meantime *take thy bill and write eighty*. A different word is used, strictly 'your copy', suggesting something repeated. Take your copy, prepare your mind's course to love your

neighbour, and write eighty. That is, teach him so that he does not stray, and strengthen him when he is weak. Teach his soul the doctrines of the four evangelists; and refresh his body, that consists of the four elements, with the help of temporal benefits. Thus you will write eighty. You should always have this copy before your eyes, so that as often as you see your neighbour you will write eighty; and as you write, you will read; and as you read, you will repeat it. As you read, the writing itself will show you the way to persevere and win the prize.

**(A theme on the four generations, and their significance: *A generation that curseth their father*.)**

13. There follows: *And the lord commended the unjust steward*, etc. The priest or prelate of the Church, because by his bad life he has wasted the goods of his Lord, is therefore called unjust. He is unjust, not just, being stained with wicked works. Yet because he counsels sinners, expounds the word of the Lord, and shows what each person should render to God and his neighbour, as far as he can, and gives prudent instruction, he is praised by the Lord: The children of this world, etc. Note that prudence concerns human matters, wisdom divine. The parts of prudence are knowledge of civil, military, terrestrial and nautical matters. Again, "Prudence is knowledge of both good and bad things, and its parts are memory, understanding and foresight."[7] Secondly, it concerns generations: that is why it goes on, as one generation succeeds another: The children of this world are more prudent in their generation, which is carnal, than the children of light. Light is that which disperses darkness. The children of this world, who follow temporal things, are more prudent in their generation than the children of light who despise them, and who by the light of their lives scatter the darkness of sin.

There is a **concordance** to this in the Proverbs of Solomon:

*There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother.*

*A generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness.*

*A generation, whose eyes are lofty and their eyelids lifted up on high.*

*A generation that for teeth hath swords, and grindeth with their jaw-teeth,*

*to devour the needy from off the earth, and the poor from among men*. [Prov 30.11-14]

Note that in this text four kinds of wicked men are set forth, namely perverse prelates, false religious, the proud, and avaricious usurers. The *generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother*, are perverse prelates and priests of the Church, who by their impurity of life and neglect of duty curse God the Father, because through them his name is blasphemed. They do not bless their Mother the Church, rather by their evil deeds they destroy her faith, which they are supposed to preach by word and example.

*A generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness*, are false religious, hypocrites like whited sepulchres, of whom blessed Bernard[8] says: "If they could live without being noticed, they would reckon everything all right for them."

*A generation, whose eyes are lofty and their eyelids lifted up on high*, are the proud, who walk with stretched-out necks and wanton glances [Is 3.16], not watching their steps but with noses in the air. The prophet says against them: Lord, my heart is not exalted: nor are my eyes lofty [Ps 130.1].

*A generation that for teeth*, etc. are misers and usurers whose teeth are weapons and arrows [Ps 56.5], who devour the poor and gain other people's property. All these are children of this world, who think the children of light are fools, and themselves wiser: but their wisdom is death [cf. Rom 8.6].

The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause:

*Wherefore he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall. Let no temptation take hold of you, but such as is human*. [1Cor 10.12-13]

The steward thought that he stood, but he fell from his stewardship because he had wasted his lord's goods. The children of this world think they stand, but when the frail prop of riches is taken away, on which they lean, they fall into hell and at last recognise that the children of light are wiser than the children of this world. Temptation (that is, delight in sin) will not take hold of you, you children of light; it will not lead your reason to give consent, except in human matters, in what cannot be avoided in this life. Human temptation is to think things other than they are, and in good faith still to make misjudgements. Yet if we lack the perfection of the angels, we should still not have the presumption of the devil.

We pray you, then, Lord Jesus Christ, to grant us love for you and our neighbour; to make us children of light; and to rescue us from the snare of sin and the temptation of the devil, so that we may be able to rise to the glory of light inaccessible. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A theme for a sermon on alms: *The almond-tree shall flourish*.)**

14. There follows, thirdly:

*And I say to you: Make unto you friends of the mammon of iniquity; that when you shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting dwellings*. [Lk 16.9]

In Syriac, mammon means the riches of wickedness- 'ill-gotten gains'. If what is ill-gotten can be well used, and so turned into justice, how much more may the divine word in which there is no wickedness lift its good dispenser up to heaven? A friend is someone who takes care of you, who loves you. "Friendship is a desire for someone's welfare, simply because one loves them; with a similar desire in return."[9] The rich folk of this world, who amass riches with lies, from injustice, have no nearer friends (did they but know it) than the poor hands of those who are Christ's treasury. St Gregory[10] says: "If the rich want to find anything in their hands after death, they have been told in whose hands they should put their riches before death." "You rich man, give Christ what he has given you. You have had a benefactor, have a debtor, and have someone who has lent to you."[11] Stretch out your withered hand, you rich man, I beg you, and what was formerly dried up with avarice will flower with alms.

Solomon says in Ecclesiastes:

*The almond-tree shall flourish, the locust shall be made fat,*

*and the caper-tree shall be destroyed*. [Eccles 12.5]

St Gregory[12] tells us that the almond-tree flowers before all other trees, and it stands for the alms-giver, who should flower with compassion and mercy, and before all else put forth the flowers of alms. So Isaiah says: *Israel shall blossom and bud* [Is 27.6]. Israel, the just man, shall blossom with alms and bud with compassion. Yet note that, although the bud comes before the blossom, it does not say 'bud' first, but blossom and bud. The reason is, that when the just man blossoms with alms, he should also bud with compassion; he should bestow upon the poor not merely with his hand, but with the affection of his heart, so that avarice does not grudge the alms.

*The almond-tree shall flower*, then, (the alms-giver) *and the locust will grow fat*. This means the poor man, who is well compared to a locust. In cold weather the locust grows sleepy and loses its strength, but when the weather grows warm it sings and jumps. In the same way the poor man loses his strength in times of hunger, cold and need. His body stiffens, his face pales, But when the warmth of kindness comes, and the help of alms, he regains his strength and gives thanks to God and the giver for the benefit he has received. And so the caper-tree (avarice) is destroyed. The bestowal of alms is the destruction of avarice. So, *Make unto you friends of the mammon of iniquity; that when you shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting dwellings*.

**(On the four tabernacles and their meaning: *That they may receive you into everlasting dwellings*.)**

15. Note that there are four dwellings, or 'tabernacles'. The first is that of carnal people, the second of beginners, the third of those making progress, and the fourth of those who have reached the goal. The first are the dwellings of the Edomites and Ismaelites; the second of Cedar, the third of Jacob, the fourth of the Lord of hosts. Of the first, the psalm

says:

*They have made a covenant together against thee,*

*the tabernacles of the Edomites, and the Ismaelites*. [Ps 82.6-7]

Edomites are ‘bloodstained, and Ismaelites are ‘obedient to themselves’ (that is, not to God). They stand for the lustful, stained with the blood of lust; and the proud, who obey their own will and not God’s. Their tabernacles, or gatherings, make a covenant against the covenant made by the Lord upon the mount, namely: Blessed are the poor in spirit [Mt 5.3]. From these dwellings we should flee to the tents of Cedar, of which Canticles says:

*I am black but beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem,*

*as the tents of Cedar, as the curtains of Solomon.*

*Do not consider me that I am brown, because the sun hath altered my col*our. [Cant 1.4-5]

You will find this text explained in the sermon: *When the unclean spirit has gone out* [Lent III, clause 4].

**(For enclosed religious: *How beautiful are thy tabernacles, O Jacob*.)**

He who performs his service well in these tents will pass to the tabernacles of Jacob, of which the book of Numbers says:

*How beautiful are thy tabernacles, O Jacob, and thy tents, O Israel!*

*As woody valleys; as watered gardens near the rivers;*

*as tabernacles which the Lord hath pitched; as cedars by the waterside*. [Num 24.5-6]

Note these three: The valleys, the gardens and the cedars. The wooded valleys represent a humble mind, the watered gardens are compunction of tears, the cedars are contemplation of heavenly things. The tabernacles of Jacob and the tents of Israel are the encampments of actives and contemplatives, whose tents are pitched by the Lord because they are disposed according to the Lord’s good will. So in Exodus Moses was told:

*Look and make it according to the pattern that was shewn thee in the mount*.[Ex 25.40]

The immovable mountain is Christ, who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, etc [Ps 1.1]. The pattern is his life, and our tents should be pitched and constructed according to it. Tents or tabernacles are the same thing, they mean the same. A tent is rigged with ropes and poles, and it may be a simple tent or a pavilion. The tabernacles of active and contemplative men are beautiful, like wooded valleys, because they are established in humility of mind, giving shade against the heat of vice. They are like watered gardens near the rivers, because their minds are watered with compunction of tears. They are like cedars by the waterside, because they are rooted and planted in the heights of contemplation, in the sweet scent of a holy way of life, and in the abundance of *the river that makes joyful the city of God* [Ps 45.5].

When he has completed his service, when *winter is past and the rains are over and gone* [Cant 2.11], he passes from these tents to *the tabernacles of the Lord of hosts* [Ps 83.2], of which the Lord promises in Isaiah:

*My people shall sit in the beauty of peace,*

*and in the tabernacles of confidence, and in wealthy rest*. [Is 32.18]

The penitent people, the people of the Lord and the sheep of his pasture [Ps 94.7], who now are standing to battle, will sit in the beauty of peace. "Peace is freedom in tranquillity"[13] , based on agreement. Peace is truly established when a treaty has been reached. Those who now enter a covenant of reconciliation with the Lord, will hereafter sit in the beauty of peace in the heavenly kingdom. Temporal peace, inward peace: how often it is corrupted, alas! But the peace of eternity remains beautiful for ever and ever, in the tabernacles of confidence. Then there will be nothing to terrify, but he will dwell in confidence and in wealthy rest. This wealthy rest stands for the double robe of glory for soul and body, which the saints will wear for ever. So make yourselves poor friends, you rich; welcome them into your dwellings, so that when the mammon of iniquity fails you, and your straw house below collapses, they will welcome you into the eternal dwellings, in which is the beauty of peace, confidence and security, and the wealthy rest of eternal satisfaction.

The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** with this third clause:

*And God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it*. [1Cor 10.13]

The Apostle speaks to the poor and penitents of Christ, serving in the tents of Cedar. God is faithful and true in his promises, and he will not let you, who are so troubled for his sake, to be tested beyond what you can bear. He who gives license to the tempter gives mercy to the tempted. With the temptation he will make a way of escape, an increase of virtue, so that you can bear it, so that you do not fail, but overcome.

Let us pray, then, dearest brothers, to our Lord Jesus Christ: that he will make us

abandon the tents of the Edomites and serve in the tents of Cedar; and so pass to the tents of Jacob's peace, that we may be able to attain the eternal dwellings of peace, confidence and rest. May he grant this, who is blessed, praiseworthy and loveable, eternal through everlasting ages. Let the whole Church say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] The passage in {brackets} is found in only one manuscript.

[2] AUGUSTINE, Sermon 351,4,7; PL 39.1542

[3] PUBLIUS SYRUS, *Sententiae*, 385

[4] cf. BERNARD, *De consideratione*, II,7,14; PL 182.750

[5] HORACE, *Epistolae* I,2,57

[6] GREGORY, *Regula pastoralis*, II,1; PL 77.25-26

[7] AUGUSTINE, *De diversis*, 31,1; PL 40.20

[8] BERNARD, *De diversis, sermo* 27,6; PL 183.615

[9] AUGUSTINE, *De diversis quaestionibus*, 31.3; PL 40.22

[10] GREGORY, *Moralia* XVIII,18,28; PL 76.52

[11] AUGUSTINE, Sermon 123,5; PL 38.686

[12] GREGORY, *Moralia* XXXI,25,46; PL 76.599

[13] CICERO, *Philippic*. II, 44,113

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## TENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the tenth Sunday after Pentecost*: When Jesus drew near to Jerusalem*, which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a theme for a sermon on the Nativity or on the Passion of the Lord: *The sun riseth and goeth down*.)**

1. At that time: *When Jesus drew near to Jerusalem, seeing the city, he wept over it, saying: If thou also had known*. [Lk 19.41]

Solomon says in Ecclesiastes:

*The sun riseth, and goeth down, and returneth to his place*

*and there rising again, maketh his round by the south, and turneth again to the north:*

*The spirit goeth forward, surveying all places round about,*

*and returneth to his circuits*. [Eccles 1.5-6]

The sun which alone gives light is Jesus Christ, who gives life to all, and gives light in the splendour and strength of spiritual grace; who 'rises' on the faithful and 'goes down' on the unfaithful. He 'rises' in his Nativity and 'goes down' in his Passion, where the sun knows his going down [Ps 103.19], and returns to his place at his Ascension, saying:

*I came forth from the Father and am come into the world* (going down);

*again I leave the world and go to the Father*. [Jn 16.28]

Nature goes in circles, and Jesus Christ, the author and ruler of nature, also takes a circular path. He returneth to his place, and there rising again (coming again from heaven in judgement), he maketh his round by the south (in considering good deeds) and turneth again to the north (considering what is evil), surveying all places because: *There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed* [Lk 12.2].

He says in Isaiah:

*I will take my rest, and consider in my place,*

*as the noon light is clear, and as a cloud of dew in the day of harvest*. [Is 18.4]

In this way, *one curtain draws another* [Ex 26.3]. When Ecclesiastes says, *he returneth to his place*, it has the same meaning as Isaiah's words, *I will take my rest*. It is as if he would say, 'I have laboured in bearing the Cross [cf. Jer 6.11]; I have gone down in my Passion, but rising again I shall return to my Father's side, where I shall take my rest.' The words*, he maketh his round by the south, and turneth again to the north*, mean the same as, *I will consider my place*. The words, *surveying all places*, mean, *as the noon light is clear*. Then the books will be opened to him, and

*the hidden things of darkness will be brought to light,*

*and the counsels of hearts will be made manifest*, [cf. 1Cor 4.5]

because Jesus Christ, the true sun, the spirit who gives life to all things and gives breath to those who dwell on the earth, will go forward, *not leaving one stone upon another* [cf. Mt 24.24], but seeing all things; *searching the wall* [cf. Is 22.5] and *digging through the wall* [cf. Ezek 12.5]; entering the very mouth of Behemoth and *tying his tongue with a cord* [cf. Job 40.20]; casting death headlong for ever with the dead, in the sight of all [cf. Is 25.8]. So he returns to his circuits with his saints in the heavenly Jerusalem, to whom he will be as a cloud of dew in the day of harvest. When the harvest is completed, *he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire, but store the grain in his heavenly barn* [cf. Mt 3.12; Lk 3.17]; and he will be like a cloud of dew, the luminous cloud that covered the camp of Israel and the tabernacle of the Church Triumphant, of dew that will refresh and satisfy. This sun and its circuits, its turning back, and its surveying, are spoken of in today's Gospel: *When Jesus drew near*, etc.

2. There are three things to note in this Gospel. First, the loving compassion of Jesus Christ for the city, as it begins: *When he drew near*. Second, the destruction of that city, continuing*: The days will come*. Third, the casting out of those buying and selling in the temple, as it concludes*: Entering the temple*. We will **concord** with these three clauses certain texts from the three books of Solomon, namely Ecclesiastes, the Canticle of love, and Wisdom.

In the Introit of today's Mass we sing: *God is in his holy place*. The Epistle from blessed Paul to the Corinthians is read: *You know that when you were heathens*, which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the three clauses of the holy Gospel. The first part is: *You know that*... The second is: *There are diversities of graces*. The third is: *To each is given*.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(On the three-fold name of Jerusalem, and its meaning: *When Jesus drew near*.)**

3. Let us say., then:

*When Jesus drew near to Jerusalem, seeing the city, he wept over it, saying: If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace; but now they are hidden from thy eyes*. [Lk 19.41-42]

Note that Jerusalem was formerly called Salem, and the Jews claim that Sem the son of Noah, whom they call Melchisedech, built it in Syria after the flood, where the kingdom of Melchisedech was. Afterwards the Jebusites held it, and from them it was called Jebus. From the joining of these two names, Jebus and Salem, there comes the name Jerusalem. Later, when it was rebuilt by Solomon, it was called Jerosolyma, short for Jero-solomonia. Salem means ‘peace’, Jebus means ‘trodden down’, and Jerusalem ‘vision of peace’. By this, the three-fold state of the soul is indicated.

In Baptism, the soul is ‘Salem’; in penitence it is ‘Jebus’; in glory it will be ‘Jerusalem’. Peace was restored to the soul in Baptism, as, from being a child of wrath, it became a child of grace. In penitence, the soul should be trodden and worn down. As Isaiah says:

*The crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under feet*. [Is 28.3]

The drunkards of Ephraim (meaning, ‘fruit-bearing’) are the rich of this world, drunk with pride and lust. Their crown, their glory, is trodden under the feet of penitence, when they become inebriated with the wine of contrition. So Proverbs says:

*There is no secret where drunkenness reigneth*. [Prov 31.4]

Nothing of wickedness is secret where the spirit of true contrition reigns. It lays bare in confession all that was previously hidden in the mind. The vision of peace will be in glory, where, as Isaiah says:

*They shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall convert Sion*. [Is 52.8]

and again:

*Then shalt thou see and abound, and thy heart shall wonder and be enlarged*. [Is 60.5]

O soul! If you used to be Jebus, you will afterwards see what the eye cannot see!

**(On the Queen of Saba and her meaning: *The Queen of Saba*.)**

4. So Isaiah says:

*The eye hath not seen, O God, besides thee,*

*what things thou hast prepared for them that wait for thee*. [Is 64.4]

Truly, you will see: because you will see the one who sees all things. You will see the wisdom of Solomon, as was told of the Queen of Saba in the third book of Kings:

*and the house which he had built in Jerusalem, and the meat of his table*. [3(1)Kg 10.3-4]

St Luke says:

*I dispose to you, as my Father hath disposed to me, a kingdom; that you may eat and drink at my table, in the kingdom of heaven*. [Lk 22.29-30]

Then, truly, you will be able to say with the Queen of Saba (which means, ‘captive’: you are a captive now, but you will be a queen):

*The report is true, which I heard in my own country (the land of my pilgrimage), concerning thy words and concerning thy wisdom. And I did not believe them that told me, till I came myself, and saw with my own eyes, and have found that the half hath not been told me. Thy wisdom and thy works exceed the fame which I heard. Blessed are thy men, and blessed are thy servants, who stand before thee always, and hear thy wisdom*. [3(1)Kg 10.6-8]

That is what you will see! You will overflow with delights and riches, the glorification of your soul and body, and your heart will wonder at the beauty of the heavenly Jerusalem, the blessedness of the angels, the everlasting crown of all the saints; and so it will be enlarged with inexpressible joy, with unspeakable happiness.

But alas! The unhappy soul puts aside such glory and such abundance, and tries to grasp fleeting things, and to embrace worthless things. So the Lord, seeing the city, wept over it, saying: *If thou also hadst known*. The Lord weeps not for an earthly city, but for the soul; not for the ruin of stones, but of virtue. Note these two words, ‘seeing’ and ‘wept’. O soul, if only you would see, you would weep indeed; but because you do not see, you do not weep.

**(On the vanity of the world: *I have seen all things under the sun*.)**

5. If only you would see. I repeat the words of Ecclesiastes:

*I have seen all things that are done under the sun:*

*and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit*. [Eccles 1.14]

Beneath the sun is vanity, above the sun is truth. The soul that is 'under the sun' by its love of temporal things, and not 'above the sun' by contemplation of heavenly things, what else should it do but weep and lament? Vanity and vexation go well together: where there is the emptiness of earthly happiness, there too is the vexation of eternal death. If you would only see, you would weep indeed!

Ecclesiastes also says:

*I turned myself to other things:*

*and I saw the oppressions that are done under the sun,*

*and the tears of the innocent.*

*And they had no comfort;*

*and they were not able to resist their violence,*

*being destitute of help from any.*

*And I praised the dead rather than the living.*

*And I judged him happier than both, that is not yet born,*

*nor hath seen the evils that are done under the sun*. [Eccles 4.1-3]

Beneath the sun there is vanity and deceit, the oppression of the weak by the strong, and violence against the poor. From this come the tears of the innocent, who have no comforter. A comforter is one who stands by the lonely, and encourages them with his words. But there is none; not a man, not a single one. If there were anyone human, surely there would be a comforter; but they are wild beasts, not human beings, who prey upon the poor who are destitute of human help, and who cannot resist their violence.

*And I praised the dead rather*: those dead to the world, that is, who are better than those who live to the world; and I judged him happier than both, that is not yet born to sin. As Job says:

*Let the day perish wherein I was born*; [Job 3.3]

that is, wherein I began to be a sinner. If this wretched soul would only see, it would weep indeed.

**(A theme for penitents, and how penance should be done: *O daughter of my people*.)**

6. Jeremiah teaches the soul how to weep for herself, saying:

*Gird thee with sack-cloth, O daughter of my people, and sprinkle thee with ashes:*

*make thee mourning as for an only son, a bitter lamentation*. [Jer 6.26]

Note the four words: sack-cloth, ashes, mourning and lamentation. 'Sack-cloth' indicates the harshness of penance and abhorrence of one's own guilt; 'ashes' indicate the humility and vileness of our condition; 'mourning' is the sorrow of our innermost contrition; and 'lamentation' indicates the shedding of tears. Christ says, 'O daughter soul, whom I bore in the exceeding pain of the Passion, you who by faith are the daughter of my people, the Church Militant, gird yourself with the sack-cloth of self-denial, so that the flesh which, when indulged, led you into sin may, when afflicted, bring you to pardon; and let that which formerly enjoyed the delights of sin now abhor them.

Note that it says 'gird', not merely 'put on'. This suggests both the curbing of lust and resistance to the devil's suggestions. The psalm says:

*Gird thy sword upon thy thigh*. [Ps 44.4]

The sack-cloth and the sword have the same meaning: the discipline of the body which restrains the lust of the loins. So Canticles says:

*Every man's sword upon his thigh, because of fears in the night*.[Cant 3.8]

Fears in the night are the hidden suggestions of the devil and the flesh. To drive them away, everyone who wants to guard the bed of the true Solomon (his conscience, in which Jesus Christ rests), must have the sword of mortification upon the thigh of his flesh.

There follows: *and sprinkle thee with ashes*, remembering the ancient curse*: Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return* [Gen 3.19]. Ashes are the remains of what has been burnt. Adam and his offspring burned with the fire of desire, fanned by the breath of a lying promise, and so were reduced to the ashes of death. Mourn as for an only son. Grief is like a wound or ulcer in the human heart, and it needs soothing for its cure. It represents contrition, the wound in the heart which must be soothed by hope in the mercy of the Redeemer.

Note that it says, '*Mourn for an only son*'. There is no greater sorrow than that of a woman who has but one son, whom she loves more than everything, when he dies. So

there can be no sorrow greater than that of the penitent soul, whose only child is faith working by love, when she loses it by mortal sin. Love is as it were the life-principle of faith; and when it is lost faith dies. When you lose the 'soul' of faith, mourn as for an only son, with bitter lamentation. Bitter tears should be added to heart-felt contrition, so that the soul may weep for herself, and revive that only child from the dead. The Lord wept for Lazarus, and over the city of Jerusalem.

**(On weeping: *Thine eyes are doves*.)**

7. Note that 'to weep' suggests shedding tears copiously; 'to cry' suggests making a noise as well; and 'to mourn' suggests acting with others who are wretched and in need of light. There is a **concordance** to these flowing tears in the Canticle of love, where the Bridegroom says to the Bride:

*Thine eyes are doves upon brooks of waters,*

*which are covered with milk, and sit beside the plentiful streams*. [cf. Cant 5.12]

The eyes represent watchful care. The dove sees reflected in the waters the hawk that is ready to sieze her. We too should see the Tormentor reflected in the streams of passing pleasure, because he both incites us to sin and exacts the penalty. 'Milk' (than which nothing is given more freely) stands for a joyful conscience in the hope of divine mercy. The 'plentiful streams' are the shedding of tears. Thus the soul is like a dove that should sit beside the plentiful streams of tears, trusting in the mercy of God, and should take the greatest care to guard herself from the deceits of passing pleasure and the malice of the devil's tempting. St Augustine[1] says: "In this vale of tears, the less we do weep, the more we ought to weep." So the Lord, seeing the city, wept over it, saying: *If thou also hadst known* the disaster that was to come, you would have wept, who now rejoice.

**(On the rejoicing of carnal people: *Come, let us enjoy good things*.)**

8. There is a **concordance** to this rejoicing in the book of Wisdom, where the wicked who do not think rightly in their minds say:

*Come, therefore, and let us enjoy the good things that are present;*

*and let us speedily use the creatures as in youth.*

*Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments:*

*and let not the flower of time pass by us.*

*Let us crown ourselves with roses, before they be withered:*

*let no meadow escape our riot.*

*Let none of us go without his part in luxury:*

*let us everywhere leave tokens of joy:*

*for this is our portion, and this is our lot*. [Wisd 2.6-9]

This text needs no explanation: we see it exemplified every day in the actions of carnal folk.

There follows: *and that, in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace*. Solomon says in Ecclesiastes:

*Because sentence is not speedily pronounced against the evil,*

*the children of men commit evils without any fear.*

*But though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and by patience be borne withal...*

*there are wicked men who are as secure as though they had the deeds of the just*. [Eccles 8.11-12,14]

O sinner, if only you knew the things that are to your peace! You are your own now, but the time will come when you will belong to another, being altogether given to the devil. You rejoice now in this your day, but his day will come, when you will mourn: *When I shall take a time, I will judge justices* [Ps 74.3]. O sinner, the Lord sets before you a time to seek salvation, and you use it for your own purposes. Believe me, he will take back what he has given, and 'judge justices'. Lord, if you judge justices, what will become of injustices?

So it says in Ezekiel:

*Behold, I come against thee, and I will draw forth my sword out of its sheath,*

*and will cut off in thee the just and the wicked*, [Ezek 21.3]

meaning those apparently just, of whom Ecclesiastes says: *Be not over just* [Eccles 7.17]. Just as a sword is carried in a sheath, so the divinity was carried in the humanity. The Father will draw this sword from its sheath and brandish it, as the prophet says: *He will brandish his sword* [Ps 7.13]. When a sword is brandished, it flashes brightly and its shadow shakes. In his Day, the Father will brandish his sword- his Son- because he will commit all judgement to him, showing his brightness to the saints and a fearful shadow of damnation to the wicked. Let the wicked be taken away, he says, lest he see the glory

of God, because he has done *wicked things in the land of the saints* [cf. Is 26.10]. Indeed, he shall *look on him whom he has pierced* [cf. Jn 19.37]. O unhappy soul! Now these things are hid from your eyes, blinded by your day and your peace. So blinded, the devil will lead you like a brute beast with the cord of cupidity, to catch those fleeting things.

So the first part of the Epistle is **concordant** with this first clause of the Gospel:

*You know that, when you were heathens, you went to dumb idols according as you were led. Wherefore I give you to understand that no man, speaking by the Spirit of God, saith Anathema to Jesus. And no man can say The Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost*. [1Cor 12.3]

Heathens (or 'Gentiles') are carnal folk who live gently, finding their peace in this day, going to dumb idols- those temporal things that look real, but are clearly false to anyone who looks closely at them. They are like dung covered with snow, *a deceitful favour and a vain beauty* [cf. Prov 31.30]. Whoever loves these idols of temporal things is 'anathema to Jesus', that is, separated from Jesus who bade him despise them.

**(A theme against the lovers of riches, religious, prelates and clergy: *Anathema in thy midst, Israel*.)**

9. There is something similar in Joshua:

*The anathema is in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thy enemies, till he be destroyed out of thee that is defiled with this wickedness*; [Jos 7.13]

(that is, Achor, to whom Josue said:]

*My son, give glory to the God of Israel, and confess, and tell me what thou hast done. Hide it not*. [Jos 7.19]

He replied:

*I saw among the spoils a scarlet garment exceeding good, and two hundred sicles of silver, and a golden rule of fifty sicles. And I coveted them, and I took them away, and hid them in the ground in the midst of my tent: and the silver I covered with the earth that I dug up... Then Josue and all Israel with him took Achor, and the silver and the garments, and the golden rule... and stoned him: and all things that were his were consumed with fire*. [Jos 7.21,24-25]

Achor means 'perverter' or 'brother's ruin'. He stands for the rich man of this world who perverts justice, and is his brother's ruin by taking away the poor man's goods, or not giving him what is rightfully his. He 'steals a garment', etc. The scarlet garment is the

livelihood of the poor, gained by much blood and sweat. The two hundred shekels of silver represent knowledge of the two Testaments. The golden rule of fifty shekels is the religious life. Soldiers and businessmen, profiteers and money-lenders, steal the scarlet garment. Prelates and clergy, the petty thieves of our day, steal the two hundred shekels of silver. False religious steal the golden rule of fifty shekels. The rich and powerful of this world look down upon the poor as their inferiors, while they themselves are subjects of the devil. They take from them the poor and bloodstained livelihood with which, somehow, they cover themselves. So Job says of them*: They send men away naked, taking away their clothes who have no covering in the cold* [Job 24.7]. Solomon says in Proverbs*: He that squeezeth too hard bringeth forth blood* [Prov 30.35], and Jeremiah: *In thy skirts is found the blood of the poor* [Jer 2.34].

Likewise, prelates and clergy steal the knowledge of the two Testaments, which because of its perfection and ringing sound is represented by two hundred shekels of silver. They do not learn it in order to benefit others, but to get praise and honours for themselves. Solomon says of them in Proverbs:

*A golden ring in a sow's snout, a woman fair and foolish*. [Prov 11.22]

A sow is a female pig, and the 'woman fair and foolish' represents the clergy: a 'woman', because soft and corrupt like harlots who expose themselves in public places for money; 'fair' in their fine clothing, hordes of nephews (and even sons), and multiplicity of benefices; 'foolish', because they do not understand what they or any one else are talking about. They sing out every day in church, but it is like the yapping of dogs; they do not understand themselves, because although their bodies are in choir, their hearts are in the market place. If they hear preaching, they do not understand it. What use is preaching to the clergy, or talking to fools? Both are just empty noise and fruitless labour. Even though these men have the golden ring of knowledge and eloquence, they are not ashamed to stick it, like the ring in a sow's snout, into the dung of lust and avarice.

Likewise, false religious steal the golden rule of fifty shekels. A rule is something used to measure with, and to correct what is crooked and bent. This golden rule is the religious life, which brings back men who are crooked and bent to the measure of right living. It sets a standard. Nearly all religious have stolen this rule, because they do not walk according to Gospel truth, and they do not live according to their founders' commands. They lead a life of crookedness and pretence. Monks steal the golden rule of blessed Benedict, canons steal the golden rule of blessed Augustine, and so with the rest. They all *seek the things that are their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's* [cf. Phil 2.21]. This rule is said to be of fifty shekels, because the life of all religious consists in penance, as is fully explained in the fiftieth psalm, Have mercy on me, O God.

So all these, who, as we have said, steal the scarlet garment, the two hundred shekels of silver, and the golden rule, will be stoned on the Day of Judgement with harsh reproaches, and will then be burnt in etenal fire; so that they will be anathematized for ever, separated from Jesus. But the just man, who acts by God's Spirit and speaks in

God's Spirit, does not say (in thought, word or deed) 'Anathema' to Jesus, anything that separates him from Jesus. And no one can say (in thought, word or deed), 'Jesus is Lord, and I am his servant', except by the Holy Spirit.

We ask you then, Lord Jesus, to pour your grace into us: that we may weep over our city, despise temporal things, and come to the heavenly Jerusalem. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A theme for a sermon on the misery of this exile, and on the end of man: *Remember thy Creator*; and the rest which is included on this matter.)**

10. There follows, secondly:

*For the days shall come upon thee, and thy enemies shall cast a wall about thee and compass thee round and straiten thee on every side, and beat thee flat to the ground, and thy children who are in thee; and they shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone; because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation*. [Lk 19.43-44]

The time will come when the demonic enemies will cast a wall about souls as they leave their bodies, and drag them into the company of their own damnation. They will compass them round and straiten them on every side, when they reveal to their gaze the wickedness, not just of their deeds, but even their words and thoughts. They will beat them flat to the ground, when the flesh is reduced to dust. Their children will fall, when *in that day all their thoughts shall perish* [Ps 145.4]; these thoughts are also signified by stones, when it goes on: and they shall not leave a stone upon a stone. When a wicked man caps a wicked thought with a worse one, he as it were lays a stone upon a stone; but when the soul is haled off to punishment, that structure of thought is demolished, and all because she did not know the time of her visitation. Sometimes God visits the wicked soul by precept, sometimes by punishment, and sometimes by miracles; but because she is proud and contemptuous, and is not ashamed of her wicked deeds, in the end she will be given up to her enemies, with whom she will be gathered in the eternal judgement of damnation. To explain why this unhappy outcome occurs, there is added: because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation.

Isaiah says:

*The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib;*

*but Israel hath not known me, and my people hath not understood*. [Is 1.3]

The 'ox' is the thief who bore the cross as an ox bears the yoke. He knew his owner when he said: *Remember me*, etc. [Lk 23.42]. The gentle ass is the Gentile centurion,

who said*: Indeed this was the Son of God*. But Israel (the clergy) does not know; and the people (the laity) do not understand.

There is a **concordance** to this in Ecclesiastes, towards the end, where it says:

*Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the time of affliction come,*

*and the years draw nigh of which thou shalt say: They please me not.*

*Before the sun and the light, and the moon and the stars be darkened,*

*and the clouds return after the rain:*

*when the keepers of the house shall tremble,*

*and the strong men shall stagger,*

*and the grinders shall be idle in a small number,*

*and they that look through the holes shall be darkened:*

*and they shall shut the doors in the street:*

*when the grinders' voice shall be low,*

*and they shall rise up at the voice of the bird,*

*and all the daughters of music shall grow deaf.*

*And they shall fear high things, and they shall be afraid in the way.*

*The almond tree shall flourish, and the locust shall be made fat,*

*and the caper-tree shall be destroyed:*

*because man shall go into the house of his eternity,*

*and the mourners shall go round about in the street.*

*Before the silver cord be broken, and the golden fillet shrink back,*

*and the pitcher be crushed at the fountain,*

*and the wheel be broken upon the cistern,*

*and the dust return into its earth, from whence it was,*

*and the spirit return to God who gave it*. [Eccles 12.1-7]

O city of Jerusalem, O soul created according to the likeness of God, remember your Creator, who made you and who will judge you, in the days of your youth, the time more prone to sin and more acceptable for doing penance.

First he says:

*Rejoice, therefore, O young man, in thy youth,*

*and let thy heart be in that which is good*. [Eccles 11.9]

In youth there is the ability to be useful; so remember, have in mind, before the time of your affliction comes- old age, death and judgement- and the years come of which you will say, They do not please me: remember in this your day what is to your peace, and what does please you. The days will come in which you will take no pleasure. You pleased yourself and displeased God; the days will come when you displease yourself. Remember, I say, before the light of the sun is darkened, before the brightness of worldly prosperity is overshadowed by the darkness of death; before the moon and the stars- the senses of the body- grow weak in old age and in death are altogether darkened. Isaiah says:

*They shall look upwards, and they shall look to the earth:*

*and behold trouble and darkness, weakness and distress, and a mist following them;*

*and they cannot fly away from their distress*. [Is 8.21-22]

‘Trouble’ is in the devil’s suggestions; ‘darkness’ is in the blinding of the mind; ‘weakness’ is in the performance of works; ‘distress’ is in custom; and the ‘mist following’ is the hell of damnation. (Alternatively: there is ‘trouble’ in this life; ‘darkness’ in old age; ‘weakness’ in sickness; ‘distress’ in the sending forth of the soul; and the ‘mist following’ in the assaults of the demons).

So, *Remember your Creator*. And *the clouds return after rain*. The clouds are preachers, who pour down rain when they announce to a soul the bondage of its damnation. They recede when he refuses to believe them, and return when what they have announced is fulfilled. When the keepers of the house shall tremble. In this text, Solomon speaks in a mixed way: now of old age, now of the death of a man; but from this point up to the

words, before the silver cord be broken, he is speaking of old age which is the herald of death.

The ‘keepers of the house’ are the ribs, which guard the inner parts and protect the delicate organs. In old age they ‘tremble’ and grow weak. The ‘strong men’ are the legs which support the whole body, which stagger and totter. The ‘grinders’ grow idle when the teeth grow weak and unable to chew food. ‘They that look through the holes’ are darkened when the eyes grow dim. They ‘shut the doors in the street’, because old men who cannot walk must stay at home; and they shut the doors so as not to see the games of the young- they cannot bear to look at things like that. The ‘grinders’ voice’ is low, because their senses are ageing, their voice is low and weak, and they cannot get, or even chew, their food by their own efforts. They rise up at ‘the voice of the bird’ (the cock) because as their blood chills they find themselves unable to sleep as they did before. The ‘daughters of music’ grow deaf, because in extreme old age the ears, which used to enjoy music, can make out nothing, and grow deaf.

*They fear higher things*. Old people are afraid of heights as their knees fail, and they are afraid in the way even on level ground, in case they fall. The almond-tree flourishes as their hair grows white, and the locust is made fat as their legs swell. Just as the locust has a fat stomach, so the lower parts of the old swell up. The caper-tree is destroyed, because lust cools as the sexual organs grow impotent. The caper has a strong effect on the kidneys, and because lust also controls the loins, it is signified by the caper. Man goes into the house of his eternity as he fails, and falls into the earth, and the mourners go round about in the street, as his friends and family accompany his corpse with lamentation. See how great your misery is, O man. Why, then, are you proud?

11. There follows a description of death*. Remember your Creator before the silver cord* of continued life *is broken; and the golden fillet*, the soul which is the most precious part of man, *shrinks back* whence it came. And *the pitcher is crushed* (the pitcher being man, made of earth), and *the wheel* (also man, ever turning in the circle of the world). He is broken at the fountain and upon the cistern when, destroyed by death, he lets go of the waters of desire which he had drawn from the well of worldly vanity. The pitcher stands for cupidity. The Samaritan woman left her pitcher at the Lord’s preaching [cf. Jn 4.28]. When a rich man dies amidst his riches, we can say that the pitcher is crushed at the fountain, because the wretch dies at the fountain of greed. The cistern is the amassing of riches; as Jeremiah says:

*They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water,*

*and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water*. [Jer 2.13]

The wheel is broken upon the cistern when a man’s cupidity does not abandon wealth, but dies in the midst of it.

The dust (the body) returns into its earth, from whence it was. The first man was told, *Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return* [Gen 3.19], and dust is blown away by the wind. And the spirit (the soul) returns to God, who gave it. It did not arise from matter; God made the soul, and freely infused into it the power to recognize him as Creator, to love him when it recognized him, to worship him when it loved him, and to enjoy him when it worshipped him.

The second part of the **Epistle** is concordant to this second clause of the Gospel:

*Now there are diversities of graces, but the same Spirit;*

*and there are diversities of ministries, but the same Lord;*

*and there are diversities of operations, but the same God, who worketh in all*. [1Cor 12.4-6]

Note these three: diversities of graces, of ministries and of operations. The Apostle calls 'graces' those virtues which are freely given by God- faith, hope and the like- whose effects are 'ministries' to our neighbour and 'operations' towards him. God infuses them, we minister, and he who infuses also operates. In speaking of the Spirit, the Lord, and God, the same underlying reality is to be understood. The Trinity exists in the Persons, and works 'all in all'. He does not give all things to any one, but does all things in all together; so that what someone does not have in himself, he has in another, and so charity and humility remain.

We beg you then, O Trinity and Unity, that when the days of affliction come, for the final return to dust and the breaking of the silver cord: the soul which you have made may return to you, and you will receive it; so that it may be freed from the assaults of the demons, and may desire to fly upwards into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Grant this, you who are blessed, God three and one, for ever and ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A theme for a sermon against simoniacs: *And entering into the temple*.)**

12. There follows, thirdly;

*And entering into the temple he began to cast out them that sold therein and them that bought; saying to them: It is written: My house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it into a den of thieves. And he was teaching daily in the temple*. [Lk 19.45-47]

John says:

*And Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And he found in the temple them that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money, sitting. And when he had made, as it were, a scourge of little cords, he drove them all out of the temple, the sheep also and the oxen; and the money of the changers he poured out, and the tables he overthrew. And to them that sold doves he said: Take these things hence, and make not the house of my Father a house of traffic*. [Jn 2.13-16]

Twice the Lord is said to have cast out those selling and buying from the temple, firstly in the first year of his preaching, and secondly when he went up to his Passion. Jesus enters the temple every day when he visits his Church and considers the actions of each one, casting out from among the saints those whose good deeds are only a pretence, or who openly do evil. The oxen which till the ground stand for the preachers of heavenly doctrine. The sellers of oxen are those who do not preach from the love of God, but to gain a temporal reward. The innocent sheep provide wool for clothing, which represent works of cleanness and piety. Those who sell them are those who do these things for the sake of human praise. The Spirit appeared in the form of a dove, and so the dove represents the Spirit, which the simoniacs sell, committing a grave sin.

In Acts, when the Jews asked what they should do, they were told, '*Do penance*' [cf. Ac 2.38]. When Simon Magus asked the same question, he was told*, 'Do penance, that perhaps God may spare you*.' [cf. Ac 8.22]. Those who change money in the Church are those who do not even pretend to serve heavenly things, but quite openly serve the things of earth. They are all cast out from the portion of the saints [cf. Col 1.12], because they either only pretend to do good, or openly do evil; and they are now scourged with the cords of sin for their correction. If they are not corrected, they will in the end be bound by them. Christ casts out the sheep and the oxen, showing his disapproval of their life and doctrine. He overturns the money and the tables, because in the end the very things they have loved will be destroyed.

When the Lord cast out the buyers and sellers from the temple, a certain brightness flashed from his eyes, which so terrified the priests and Levites that they could not withstand him.

**(On the Wisdom of God, Jesus Christ, and his power: *Wisdom reacheth*.)**

13. There is a **concordance** to this in the book of Wisdom, where it says:

*Wisdom reacheth everywhere by reason of her purity.*

*For she is a vapour of the power of God*

*and a certain pure emanation of the glory of the almighty God;*

*and therefore no defiled thing cometh into her.*

*For she is the brightness of eternal light,*

*and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty,*

*and the image of his goodness.*

*And being but one, she can do all things:*

*and remaining in herself the same, she reneweth all things*. [Wisd 7.24-27]

Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God, reaches everywhere; satisfying the angels in heaven with his vision, mercifully encouraging sinners on earth to repentance, and punishing in hell the demons and sinners who have passed beyond hope. He reaches everywhere by reason of his purity, because he is light, and *in him there is no darkness* [1Jn 1.5]. He is a vapour that warms the chill of our faithlessness, and that exists by the same power as God the Father. He is an emanation, the splendour of a consubstantial, equal and co-eternal glory, which proceeds somehow from the brightness of the Almighty, which exists in a single brightness with the Almighty. He is pure, because no evil can approach the supreme Good, and therefore no defiled thing comes into her, because Good is always simple. She is the brightness of eternal light, and a mirror in which the Father is seen: whence, *He who sees me sees also my Father* [Jn 14.9]. Unspotted, *because He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth* [1Pt 2.22]. The image of his goodness, the full representation which exists with him in the same goodness; and being but one (with the Father) he can do all things (because he is almighty), and remaining unchangeable, he renews all things by ruling and ordering them. No wonder that he cast out from the temple those who sold and bought, and that the priests and Levites could not withstand him!

Alternatively: The Wisdom of the Father was a warming vapour by his Incarnation, when the winter of infidelity was past, the rain of demonic persecution was over and gone, and the flowers of eternal promise appeared in our land [cf. Cant 2.11-12]. Wisdom was an emanation of glory in the working of miracles, and the brightness of the eternal light in his resurrection. He will be to us an unspotted mirror in eternal blessedness, where we shall see him as he is [cf. 1Jn 3.2], and his wisdom will be reflected in us. St Augustine[2] asks, "What will that love be, when each of us will see our own faces reflected in each other's, as clearly as we now see each other's faces?"

The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this third clause:

*And the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man unto profit.*

*To one indeed, by the Spirit, is given the word of wisdom;*

*and to another, the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit*, etc. [1Cor 12.7-8]

Gifts are given and divided among each one, not always according to merit, but for their usefulness in building up the Church. Those who sell or buy these gifts must be cast out of the Church, as Christ cast the buyers and sellers out of the temple.

**(A moral sermon on contemplation: *When I go into my house*.)**

14. My house shall be called a house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves.

Solomon says in the book of Wisdom:

*When I go into my house, I shall repose myself with her* (i.e. Wisdom);

*for her conversation hath no bitterness,*

*nor her company any tediousness, but joy and gladness*. [Wisd 8.16]

The spiritual man returns from the care of temporal things, and from restless thoughts, and enters into the house of his own conscience. He shuts the door of the five senses, and reposes himself with Wisdom, making space for divine contemplation wherein he tastes the quiet of heavenly sweetness. The conversation of Wisdom has no bitterness, no delight in sin, and it does not infect with poison the palate it rests on. Nor does her company have any tediousness. Spiritual men increase in desire for her delights, and the more they consume them the more they love them. In this there is joy and gladness. Blessed is that house, happy is that conscience, which tastes the savour of Wisdom, and in which Wisdom herself takes repose, saying, *My house shall be called a house of prayer*.

**(A sermon on prayer, and the things necessary for it, and on the nature of bees: *My house shall be called a house of prayer*.)**

'Domicile' suggests 'dome' or 'roof'. A house has three parts: the foundation, the walls and the roof. The foundation is humility, the walls are the combined virtues, and the roof is charity. When all these come together, the Lord is present, and says, My house shall be called a house of prayer. For prayer ('orison' or 'oral reason'), six elements are necessary: the fragrance of inner devotion, delight in tribulation, tears of compunction, mortification of the flesh, cleanness of life and almsgiving. These are noted in Genesis, where Jacob says to his sons:

*Go and carry presents to the man* (Joseph):

*a little balm and honey, incense, myrrh, resin and almonds*. [cf. Gen 43.11]

Balm is the fragrance of inner devotion, as Ecclesiasticus says: *My odour is as the*

*purest balm* [Ecclus 24.21].

Honey is delight in tribulation, as it says in Deuteronomy: *They sucked honey out of the rock* [cf. Dt 32.13]. The rock is the hardness of adversity or tribulation. Job says:

*In the hardness of thy hand thou art against me*. [Job 30.21]

To suck honey out of the rock is to receive the harshness of adversity in peace of mind. Natural History tells us that bees sit in their hives and suck honey from the combs; and it is said that if they do not do this, the contents of the combs goes bad and generates spiders. The honey-comb is honey in wax, and it must be eaten rather than drunk.

The bees are like the just, who sit in their hives by afflicting and humbling their bodies, and suck what is in the combs. Just as a honey-comb consists of honey and wax, so in the life of the just man there is the honey of inner sweetness and the wax of outward adversity, which melts and runs when exposed to the fire, the presence of divine love. I pray that these bees will sit in their hives and suck what is in the combs, lest by impatience and bitterness of heart the honey of inner sweetness be corrupted, and generate a spider. The spider, which spins its thread in the air, signifies pride of heart, which even in the heavenly realm strives to live in the hearts of heaven's citizens. Alas, indeed! When honey goes bad, it generates a spider; for from the corruption of inner sweetness the spider of pride is born.

Incense is prayer, whence: *Let my prayer be directed as incense in thy sight* [Ps 140.2]. Incense is offered to God, and it is found only in Arabia (which means 'sacred'). There is found a tree called 'libanus', resembling laurel in bark and leaves. It exudes a sap like that of the almond-tree. This is collected twice a year, in autumn and in spring. The autumn gathering is prepared for by cutting the bark in the heat of summer. The rich juice pours out and congeals where the nature of the place demands. This is white incense. The second harvest is prepared in winter, by cutting the bark. It comes out red, and is not like the first. The young shoots of the tree are whiter, but the old are more fragrant. Whoever owns such a glade is termed 'sacred' in Arabic; and those who tend or visit these places must not participate in funerals, or have relations with women.

**(For religious, and on the gathering of incense, and its characteristics: *As libanus not cut*.)**

15. 'Arabia' is the holy mind of a just man, in which there is (and there should be) 'libanus' (meaning 'whiteness'), that is, cleanness of life which proceeds from the incense of true prayer. So Ecclesiasticus says:

*I perfumed my dwelling... as libanus not cut*. [Ecclus 24.21]

Libanus stands for all those whose life is based on prayer. All religious should be 'uncut libanus', in particular so that their minds are not divided in prayer, having one thing on

their lips and another in their hearts. A divided mind does not pray, so they should labour to be whole, that their tongues accord with their hearts, and that there be a sweet melody in the ears of the Lord of hosts.

The collection of incense in autumn represents the devout prayer of proficients; the spring harvest of incense is the prayer of beginners, that is, the newly-converted. These, just like the former, emit gum when their bark is cut, because when their hearts are pricked they render prayer to God. But the former are cut in the heat of summer, and the latter in winter. The former produce white incense, the latter red. For proficients, in the fervour of heavenly desire, send forth all their devout prayer with tears of compunction; whereas beginners, in the winter of their temptation, and still afflicted by the cold of the devil's suggestions, emit a sorrowful prayer, as it were bloody with bitter tears and sighs. When Pharao is spurned, he rises up to create obstacles.

The incense of the new shoots is whiter, but that of the old is more fragrant. First should come purity of life, then should follow the fragrance of good repute. When you begin, you should strive more for purity of life; when you are making progress, seek the fragrance of good repute. Whoever wants to gather the incense of prayer and offer it to God, should beware of involvement in the 'funerals' of rancour and hate (*Whoever hates his brother is a murderer* [1Jn 3.15]) and of pollution with evil thoughts- let alone relations with women.

Myrrh, whose name means 'bitterness', is the mortification of the flesh. Of this, the book of Judith tells how: Judith *washed her body and anointed herself with the best myrrh* [Jud 10.4]. The person who confesses should wash himself in confession, and anoint himself with mortification of the flesh to make satisfaction for sin. It was said to Daniel: *From the first day that thou didst set thy heart to understand, to afflict thyself in the sight of thy God, thy words have been heard* [Dan 10.12]- in the sight of God, he says, not of men!

**(On compunction of tears: *I will water thee with my tears, Hesebon*.)**

16. Resin is the 'tear' of a tree, and it represents the tears that flow from the inmost heart. Of these, the Lord said to Ezechias: *I have heard thy prayer, and I have seen thy tears* [Is 38.5]; and:

*I will water thee with my tears, O Hesebon and Eleale*. [Is 38.5]

Hesebon means 'girdle of sadness' or 'knowledge of grief', and Eleale is 'going up'. They stand for penitent souls which are girded with the girdle of sadness and grief, so as to be made ready to go up to the house of the Lord. So Isaiah says:

*By the ascent of Luith they shall go up weeping;*

*and in the way of Oronaim they shall lift up a cry of contrition*. [Is 15.5]

Luith means 'cheeks'; so by the ascent of Luith, the cheeks, he goes up weeping to the Lord. Oronaim is 'cleft of sorrow', meaning the eyes through which the cry of lamentation goes forth, going up to the Lord. So it says in Ecclesiasticus:

*Do not the widow's tears run down the cheek,*

*and her cry against him that causeth them to fall?*

*For from the cheek they go up to heaven,*

*and the Lord that heareth will not be delighted in them*. [Ecclus 35.18-19]

The Lord inebriates penitent souls with the tears of his Passion*, offering himself with a loud cry and tears* to God the Father [cf. Heb 5.7]. He inebriates, I say, so that forgetful of temporal things they *reach out to what lies ahead* [cf. Phil 3.13].

The almond-tree, which flowers in winter, stands for alms, with which we should flower in the winter of this present life. So Ecclesiastes says: *The almond-tree shall flourish*, etc. [Eccles 12.5]. (Refer to the third part of the Gospel: *There was a certain rich man, that had a vineyard* [Pentecost IX]). Ecclesiasticus says: *Son, defraud not the poor of alms* [Ecclus 4.1]. The words, defraud not, are well chosen, for fraud takes what belongs to another, according to the maxim, 'He who keeps for himself more than he needs, is guilty of stealing what belongs to another.' Alms are, as it were, 'God's water', and the Greek word *eleemosyna* means 'mercy'. Happy the house, and happy the store-room, in which these six are to be found; from which pure prayer proceeds and goes up to God's ears, asking for everything it requires. The Lord says well*, My house shall be called a house of prayer*.

There is a **concordance** to this house in the Introit of todays Mass:

*God is in his holy place: God who maketh men of one manner to dwell in a house.*

*It is he who will give power and strength to his people*. [Ps 67.6-7,36]

The place and the house stand for the mind of the just man. It is a 'place' after Ezekiel's words:

*I heard behind me the voice of a great commotion, saying:*

*Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place*. [Ezek 3.12]

The voice of a great commotion is contrition of heart, by which the human mind becomes the place of God, from which God is blessed and glorified. It is a 'house', of which it is said: My house shall be called a house of prayer. In this house he makes reason and

sensuality to dwell in one manner, so that sensuality is subject to reason, and reason to its superior, namely God. It is he who will give power (virtue) to his people, lest prosperity make them proud; and strength, lest adversity cast them down. So Isaiah says*: It is he that giveth strength to the weary, and increaseth force and might to them that are not* [Is 40.29].

**(On the den of thieves and the nature of the dragon, the ostrich, the hairy beast, the owl and the siren, and what they mean: *Wild beasts shall rest*.)**

17. There follows: *But you have made it a den of thieves*. Jeremiah says:

*Is this house then, in which my name has been called upon,*

*in your eyes become a den of robbers?*[Jer 7.11]

The human conscience becomes a robbers' den when what Isaiah says happens to it:

*Wild beasts shall rest there, and their houses shall be filled with dragons:*

*and ostriches shall dwell there, and the hairy ones shall dance there.*

*And owls shall answer one another, in the houses thereof,*

*and sirens in the temples of pleasure*. [Is 13.21-22]

Beasts lay waste, savaging with teeth and claws. A dragon is a serpent greater than all other animals without feet. When dragged out of its lair, it takes to the air and violently shakes it. Its strength is in its tail rather than in its teeth. The sea-dragon has a sting in its limbs, turned towards its tail. The ostrich is a creature with bird-like wings, but it cannot lift itself off the ground. It neglects the care of its eggs, which are thrown anywhere and kept alive by the warmth of the dust. The 'hairy ones', or incubi, are shaped like humans above, but like beasts below. The Greeks call them 'pans' or 'fauns'. The pagans thought that fauns were bearded, red-faced, and had feet like goats. Owls are nocturnal birds which give a hooting sound. They are often called night-hawks, or cave-birds. Sirens (it is said) are deadly sea-animals, human from head to navel, and bird-like from there to the feet. They sing a song, most sweet in melody, and by the sweetness of their voices they draw to themselves sailors, who hear them far off, and when they have put them into a deep sleep they tear them to pieces. (Their real counterparts are harlots, who reduce to penury those who resort to them.) They were supposed to have wings and claws, because lustful love is flighty and injurious.

Note that the beasts stand for pride and plunder; the dragons for the poisonous malice of wrath and envy; the ostriches for the deceitfulness of hypocrites; the fauns for avarice and simony; the owls for detraction; and the sirens for gluttony and lust. It is from pride

that robbers, like wild beasts, plunder the poor, orphans and widows. Ezekiel says of the proud and powerful of this world:

*She took one of her cubs and set him up for a lion,*

*and he learned to catch the prey and to devour men.*

*He learned to make widows,*

*and the fulness of him came from the noise of his roaring*. [Ezek 19.5-7]

The wrathful and envious, like dragons drawn out of the lair of their own conscience, cannot contain themselves, but fill the air with words, making it ring with their clamour, defiling it with blasphemies. The strength of their malice is not only in their teeth (their blasphemy), but chiefly in their tail (the revenge and injury that they inflict with their hands). Hypocrites are like ostriches. They have an appearance of holiness, but are weighed down with love of temporal glory. They cannot raise themselves from earthly things. The ostrich neglects the care of its eggs, and the hypocrite deserts the children obtained by his preaching, so that they perish amid earthly things. So Job says:

*The wing of the ostrich is like the wings of the heron, and of the hawk.*

*When she leaveth her eggs on the earth, thou perhaps will warm them in the dust?*

*She forgetteth that the foot may tread upon them,*

*or that the beasts of the field may break them.*

*She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers*. [Job 39.13-16]

Eggs are moist within, and represent the newly-converted, who have the moisture of compunction in their hearts, which the Lord warms in the dust of humble penance, so that they may produce the fruit of good works. The hypocritical prelate, intent on temporal glory, forgets that the foot of carnal affection may tread on them, and the beasts of the field (the devils) may break his subjects. He is hardened against them as if they were not his. *He is a hireling, and so has no concern* for the eggs or the sheep [cf. Jn 10.13].

The avaricious and simoniacs nowadays dance and play like fauns in the Church of Christ- red-faced, filled and fattened, their feet (affections) and morals are like goats: they stink. The cave of their conscience bears witness to their filth. Detractors and flatterers are like owls. In the night (the absence of those they criticise) and with false praise to those they flatter, they hoot horribly. Gluttons and the lustful, like sirens, tear their own souls, devour their own substance, and cast into the sea of eternal damnation

those they seduce, along with themselves. See how the house, the Church of God, is filled from top to bottom with these vices and made as it were a robbers' den; while the human conscience is made a cave of demons. So the Lord says: *You have made it a den of thieves*.

Ah, then, dearest brothers! Let us humbly and with tears entreat the Lord Jesus Christ to cast out of his Church the simoniac sellers and buyers; and to drive out from the house of our conscience, once his own, the aforesaid vices, and to make it a real house of holy prayer. So may we be found fit to attain the house of the heavenly Jerusalem. May he grant this, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever and ever. Let every pure conscience say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] cf. AUGUSTINE, Confessions, X,1; PL 32.779

[2] This quotation has not been traced in AUGUSTINE, or elsewhere.

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost: *Two men went up into the temple*, which is divided into two clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a theme for a sermon on the Nativity of the Lord, and on the four horses of the sun and their meaning: *The sun three times*.)**

1. At that time: *To some who trusted in themselves as just and despised others, Jesus spoke this parable: Two men went up into the temple*, etc. [Lk 18.9-10]

It says in Ecclesiasticus:

*The sun, three times as much, burneth the mountains, breathing out fiery rays;*

*and shining with his beams, he blindeth the eyes*. [Ecclus 43.4]

The sun shines alone, obscuring all other stars with its radiance. It is depicted with four horses: *Pyrois* (‘Shining’), *Heous* (‘Warming’), *Aethon* (‘Burning’) and *Phlegon* (‘Cooling’); which represent four characteristics of the sun. When it rises, it shines; when it goes up the sky, it warms; at noon, it burns; and as it declines towards sunset, it cools. The true sun is Jesus Christ, *who dwells in inaccessible light* [cf. 1Tim 6.16]. Compared with his light, all other light is darkness; and compared to his justice, all the justice of the saints *is like a soiled rag* [cf. Is 64.6].

The four horses of the sun are the four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Matthew is the ‘shining horse’, and he is represented in the form of a man because he wrote of the human origin of Christ: *The book of the generation of Jesus Christ* [Mt 1.1]. Mark is the ‘warming horse’, and he is represented by a lion, which is hot-natured, and he wrote *of a voice of one crying in the desert* [Mk 1.3]. John is the ‘burning horse’, and he is represented by an eagle because, with unblinking eyes, like an eagle soaring high, he gazed at the sun when he wrote, *In the beginning was the Word* [Jn 1.1]. Luke is the ‘cooling horse’, and is given the form of an ox, which is slain in sacrifice. Jesus Christ was the Sun that shone in his Nativity, warmed in his preaching (when he roared like a lion, saying: *Do penance* [Mt 3.2], burned in his working of miracles (whereby he showed that he was truly God), and cooled in his Passion, like an ox sacrificed to his Father,

before setting in his death.

Again, when this Sun rises upon a sinner, it shines on him, so that he recognises his sin; warms him to feel sorrow for it; burns him in the fervour of satisfaction; and cools him in the mortification of vices. Of this Sun, Ecclesiasticus says: *The sun, three times as much, burneth the mountains*. A mountain is immoveable. The 'mountains' of this world are the proud, of whom the psalm says:

*The mountains melted like wax, at the presence of the Lord*. [Ps 96.5]

This happens when he burns them three-fold, by contrition, confession and satisfaction in works. The prophet prayed to be burned with this burning when he said: *Burn my reins and my heart* [Ps 25.2]. The heart is burned in contrition, the tongue in confession, and the reins in satisfaction.

There follows: *Breathing out fiery rays*. This means breathing out from itself. The rays of the Sun are the poverty and humility, patience and obedience of Jesus Christ. As many as are the examples and words of salvation that he gave us, so many are the rays of fire with which we are inflamed with his love, and which he breathes from himself upon us. And of this, there is added: And shining with his beauty he blindeth the eyes. He blinds the eyes of the proud with the rays of his poverty and humility, so that *seeing they may not see* [cf. Jn 12.40]. It is like the action of an eye-salve, which blurs and as it were blinds the diseased eye, but afterwards makes it clear and bright. That is why he says himself, in John:

*For judgement I am come into this world;*

*that they who see may not see; and they who see may become blind*. [Jn 9.39]

And also: *If you were blind, you should not have sin*, because you would seek the eye-salve that takes away all sin, *but now you say: We see; your sin remaineth* [Jn 9.41]. Set on fire and burnt by this sun, the publican was blinded (the true penitent). Of him the Gospel says*: Two men went up into the temple*.

2. There are two points to note in this Gospel: the arrogance of the Pharisee and the humility of the publican. The first part begins: *Two men*, etc. The second continues: *And the publican, standing far off*. On this and the following Sunday we shall **concord** some texts from the book of Ecclesiasticus with the clauses of this and the following Gospel.

In the Introit of today's Mass we sing: *O God, come to my assistance* [Ps 69.2]; and the Epistle is read from blessed Paul to the Corinthians: *I make known unto you the Gospel* [1Cor 15.1ff], which we will divide into two parts and **concord** with the clauses of the Gospel. The first is*: I make known to you*. The second is: *I am the least*.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(The four kinds of pride: *Two men went up*.)**

3. Let us say, then:

*Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee and the other a publican. The Pharisee, standing, prayed thus with himself: O God, I give thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, as also is this publican. I fast twice in as week; I give tithes of all that I possess*. [Lk 18.10-12]

Let us note first that, according to the Gloss, there are four kinds of swelling pride: when someone attributes to himself the good that he has; or, if he acknowledges that it is given by God, he thinks that this is due to his own merits; or, he boasts of having what he does not, in fact, have; or, despising others, he wishes it so seem as if he alone has what he has- as the saying goes:

"Falsely, a credit over all to claim, they blow their trumpet, puff their own good name."

The Pharisee suffered from this disease, and that is why he went down not justified, because he attributed his good qualities to himself alone, and looked down on the publican. There you may see the dead lion and living dog of which Solomon speaks:

*A living dog is better than a dead lion*, [Eccles 9.4]

the humble publican and the proud Pharisee!

Note that the neck-bone of a lion is continuous and has no vertebrae, and the bones have no marrow in them. A lion's bones are particularly hard, more than those of any other animal, and if one is struck against another it causes a spark. In the same way, the proud man's neck is stiff and unbending. So Job says:

*He hath stretched out his hand against God,*

*and hath strengthened himself against the Almighty.*

*He hath run against him with his neck raised up,*

*and is armed with a fat neck*. [Job 15.25-26]

"Bend thy boughs, O tree of glory!

Thy relaxing sinews bend;

For awhile the ancient rigour

That thy birth bestowed, suspend."[1]

Proud Pharisee:

*Why doth thy heart elevate thee, and why dost thou stare with thy eyes,*

*as if thou wert thinking great things?*

*Why doth thy spirit swell against God, to utter such words out of thy mouth?* [Job 15.12-13]

Words like: *I am not as the rest of men, extortioners*.

*What is man that he should be without spot,*

*and he that is born of a woman that he should appear just?*

*Behold... the heavens are not pure in his sight.*

*How much more is man abominable and unprofitable?* [Job 15.14-16]

And in the same book:

*Behold, they that serve him are not steadfast;*

*and in his angels he found wickedness;*

*How much more shall they that dwell in houses of clay,*

*who have an earthly foundation!* [Job 4.18-19]

The proud man lacks the marrow of compunction or compassion, and from the collision of his words and works there is struck a spark of arrogance, wrath and vainglory.

Thus it says in the book of Judges:

*Let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Libanus*. [Jg 9.15]

The bramble is the thickest kind of thorn, and the most troublesome. It represents the proud man, thickly sown with the thorns of riches and sins. From it comes the fire of

pride, devouring all the cedars of Libanus: that is, all the works he does, such as, I fast twice a week, etc. St Gregory[2] says, "What use is it to guard the whole city, if one gap is left through which an enemy may enter?" When we boast about the perfection of our good life, we only show that it has not yet even begun. Ecclesiasticus says:

*Extol not thyself in doing thy work.*

*Every proud man is an abomination to the Lord*. [Ecclus 10.29; Prov 16.5]

Aptly compared to a dead lion is that Pharisee, standing, stiff-necked. Pharisee means ‘separated’. Thinking himself just, he separated himself from the publican, saying: *I am not as the rest of men, extortioners*, etc. What doe he mean by ‘the rest of men’ if not ‘everyone but me’? It is as though he said, ‘I alone am just, the rest are sinners.’

**(Against the proud poor man, the lying rich man, and the foolish old man: *Three sorts*.)**

4. There is a **concordance** to this in Ecclesiasticus:

*Three sorts my soul hateth, and I am greatly grieved at their life:*

*a poor man that is proud; a rich man that is a liar;*

*an old man that is a fool and doting*. [Ecclus 25.3-4]

A proud man thinks too highly of himself; a liar deceives another’s mind; the senile do not know themselves and their wits wander because of extreme old age. Doctors say that they ‘enter their second childhood’, but in children the blood has not yet become hot, whereas in the aged it has again grown cold.

These three sorts, hateful to God, are to be found in the Pharisee and in any proud man. The Pharisee was a poor man that is proud: poor, because he left an opening whereby thieves entered and stole all his goods; proud, because he got above himself when he thought himself better than others. A proud man is poor, because he lacks the riches of humility, the lack of which leaves one supremely wretched.

The Pharisee was a rich man that is a liar: rich, when he said, *I fast twice a week*; a liar, when he prefaced this with, *I am not as the rest of men*. The religious of our day are rich in the appearance of holiness, but they lie when they boast in their hearts. They say, like Elijah in the third book of Kings:

*With zeal I have been zealous for the Lord God of hosts:*

*for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant.*

*They have thrown down thy altars, they have slain thy prophets with the sword,*

*and I alone am left: and they seek my life to take it away*. [3(1)Kg 19.10]

Let those who think that they alone serve God and kneel before him listen to his own words:

*I have left me seven thousand men in Israel,*

*whose knees have not been bowed before Baal*. [3(1)Kg 19.18]

Brother- even from Nazareth some good thing can come! [cf. Jn 1.46] Our God is not only God of the hills, but also of the valleys! [cf. 3(1)Kg 20.28] In Canticles he says:

*I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys*.[Cant 2.1]

The Lord dwells on high, yet his gaze is upon the lowly [cf. Ps 137.6].

The Pharisee was also an old man that is a fool: an old man, because he did not know himself, he had lost his wits, and did not understand what he was saying. He went up to the temple to pray, not to praise himself; but he began with self praise when he should have started with the Lord's prayer. That is what some people do when they preach: they begin with self-praise, as a prologue. *Praise in one's own mouth defiles* [Ecclus 15.9], and, *Let another praise thee, not thine own mouth* [Prov 27.2].

5. The first part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this first clause:

*Now I make known to you the Gospel which I preached to you, which also you have received and wherein you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast after what manner I preached unto you, unless you have believed in vain.* [1Cor 15.1-2]

The Gospel which Christ and the Apostles preached is humility. He said:

*Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart*.[Mt 11.29]

The disciples learned this lesson from him, and taught it to others. So St Paul (whose name means 'small') says, *I make known to you the Gospel wherein you stand, by which also you are saved*. Where there is humility there is firm standing and salvation. Because the Pharisee lacked it, he fell; and even as he justified himself, he made himself a sinner. He who has humility is saved, but he who does not have it believes in vain and works in vain. It is because one comes to glory by humility, that this Epistle (which mentions Christ's death and resurrection) is read with today's Gospel, which says that whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. Christ humbled himself even to death, and he was

exalted in his resurrection.

Let us, then, dearest brothers, ask the Lord Jesus Christ himself to take away from us the boasting of the Pharisee; and to imprint upon our hearts the Gospel of his humility; that we may go up to the temple of glory and, set at his right hand in the general resurrection, may deserve to rejoice with him. May he grant this, who died and rose again, to whom be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

**(A moral sermon on the misery of our body: *Three sorts*.)**

6. *Three sorts my soul hateth, and I am greatly grieved at their life:*

*a poor man that is proud;*

*a rich man that is a liar;*

*an old man that is a fool and doting*.

Ecclesiasticus says:

*The most High hath created medicines out of the earth:*

*and a wise man will not abhor them*. [Ecclus 38.4]

The most High, Jesus Christ, has created from the earth (his flesh) the medicine of humility with which he has healed the human race. Alternatively: he created medicine from the earth when, by the affliction of the body, the wounds of the spirit are healed. So medicine is made from our flesh, as from a 'healing serpent'. The flesh was like the serpent in relation to our guilt, but it will give healing in our punishment. The wise man will not abhor this medicine, the humility of Christ and the affliction of the flesh; but the proud, the liar and the senseless reject it. Of them it is said*: Three sorts my soul hateth: a poor man that is proud*, etc.

7. The proud poor man is our wretched body; the rich liar is this world; and the foolish old man is the devil. The body is subject to corruption- indeed, 'corpse' and 'corrupt' have a similar sound. It is poor, because it possesses little and controls little. Our body is poor, because it enters this exile naked, blind and weeping; and naked, blind and wretched it leaves this exile again (and would that it be not to eternal destruction!), subject to the necessities of hunger and cold, afflicted with infirmity, and full of corruption and uncleanness. Poor and unhappy creature, where does your pride come from? Whence comes your glory? If you want to be proud, you are being proud of a stinking sewer which you carry about with you. O wretch, wretched and poor, who do you think you are? What do you boast about? Are you not someone who was procreated from stinking seed in the secret cavern of your mother's womb? For nine months you were nourished there

on the blood of menstruation, that drives dogs mad if they taste it. Whence, then, is your pride? Are you proud, perhaps, of your parents' blood? If you are, you are surely proud of the dunghill from which you were born! Is it perhaps of riches? Then you are proud of what belongs to another. It is not yours, it is just lent to you. It is not yours, because you cannot take it with you. Death's gate is very narrow, and even the poor and naked can scarcely pass through it, taking only their sins with them, which are nothing. Maybe you glory in your wisdom and eloquence? *Not to you, not to you the glory, but to him alone* [cf. Ps 113.9]*, who gives a mouth and wisdom* [cf. Lk 21.15], *who made the dumb to speak and the deaf to hear* [cf. Mk 7.37]. O pauper, you body of miseries, seeing that you are in such need and wretchedness, are you proud of so much, do you glory in so much? What would you do if you were rich*? Blessed be God, who hast humbled the proud one, as one that is slain* [Ps 88.11], who has dried up the sea, the waters of the roaring deep, who has struck the dragon and put down the mighty. He has given you

*instead of a sweet smell, a stench; instead of a girdle, a cord;*

*instead of curled hair, baldness*. [Is 3.24]

Humble yourself, then, you poor wretch. Groan and weep, and say with Jeremiah:

*I am the man that see my poverty by the rod of his indignation.*

*He hath led me and brought me into darkness, and not into light.*

*My skin and my flesh he hath made old: he hath broken my bones.*

*He hath built round about me: and he hath compassed me with gall and labour.*

*He hath set me in dark places, as those that are dead for ever.*

*He hath built against me round about, that I may not get out: he hath made my fetters heavy.*

*He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath inebriated me with wormwood.*

*He hath broken my teeth one by one: he hath fed me with ashes.*

*Remember my poverty and my transgression, the wormwood and the gall*. [Lam 3.1-2,4-7,15-16,19]

**(The mendacity of the world: *A rich man that is a liar*.)**

8. There follows: *a rich man that is a liar*. This rich man is the world, of whose riches the prophet Nahum says:

*As for Ninive, her waters are like a great pool: but the men flee away.*

*Stand, stand! But there is none that will return back.*

*Take ye the spoil of the silver, take ye the spoil of the gold;*

*for there is no end of the riches of all the precious vessels*. [Nah 2.8-9]

Niniveh (meaning 'beautiful') stands for the world, fair with a deceitful beauty. Her waters (riches and pleasures) are like a pool that dries up in the summer heat. When the heat of death comes, riches and delights dry up. So Ecclesiasticus says:

*In the end of a man is the stripping of his works*. [Ecclus 11.29]

They all flee away, they all pay the debt of death. Niniveh, the fair harlot, laughs at them and says, Stand, stand! Take the silver, take the gold. The lovers of the world leave behind what they cannot take with them, because *the days of man are like a shadow* [cf. Job 8.9], and *his life is like a wind* [cf. Job 7.7] which passes and does not return. As there is no end to Niniveh's riches, so there will be no end to her miseries. Of all the precious vessels: these vessels are the hearts of worldlings, so deep in their cupidity that, however great the multitude of riches, they cannot be satisfied.

The same prophet adds, concerning the world's lies:

*Woe to thee, O city of blood, all full of lies and violence:*

*rapine shall not depart from thee*. [Nah 3.1]

Woe to the world of guilt and punishment, the city of blood (that is, sins) in which there is no truth, only lies. As the Psalm says:

*Truths are decayed from among the children of men*. [Ps 11.2]

This city is all full of lies and violence. St Gregory[3] says, "This present life can only be had with tears, and so it can only be loved with tears." In Jeremiah, the Lord says of its lying:

*It is become to me as the falsehood of deceitful waters that cannot be trusted*. [Jer 15.18]

These faithless waters are riches,which keep no faith with their possessor. They promise him much, but deliver nothing. When their lovers abound with them, they praise God*: He will praise thee when thou shalt do well with him* [Ps 48.19]. St Gregory[4] says, "Useless

praise, that springs from prosperity! More meritorious is that which the power of sorrow does not take away." Carnal folk praise God while they enjoy riches, but when these are taken from them, they lie to the Lord.

**(The folly of the devil, and the obedience of Christ: *An old man that is a fool*.)**

9. There follows: *An old man that is a fool and doting*. This old fool is the devil, of whom Ecclesiastes says:

*Better is a child that is poor and wise than a king that is old and foolish,*

*who knoweth not to foresee for hereafter*. [Eccles 4.13]

He did not keep the wisdom that was given him among the angels, because he would not be subject to his Creator. Those who refuse to be subject to the yoke of obedience, for the sake of him who was obedient even to the Cross, are made the devil's members. Every time you contumaciously despise obedience to your superior, you become like to the apostate angels. You despise not men, but God who places men over the heads of men.

So Job says:

*Who made a weight for the winds*. [Job 28.25]

The wind is strong and violent. Human nature is prone to evil from its youth, and is like a wind, light yet violent. So God makes a weight for it, obedience to prelates, so that being made heavy by that weight it may not be foolishly lifted up above itself, like the devil, and so miserably fall below itself. In Lamentations, Jeremiah says:

*It is good for a man when he hath borne the yoke from his youth.*

*He shall sit solitary and hold his peace:*

*because he hath taken himself above himself*. [Lam 3.27-28]

When you humbly place others above yourself, then you will wonderfully raise yourself up above yourself. A yoke is something that joins two things together. Bear, then, my son, the yoke of obedience with Christ the Son of God. The young calf, Jesus Christ, bound by the yoke of obedience, has drawn all by himself the burden of all our sins. So Isaiah says:

*The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.* [Is 53.6]

The Jews, like countrymen with a goad, prodded him to make him go faster. See how

this young child of ours, all alone, pulled the weight that men and angels were unable to bear; and no one thinks about it, or perceives in his heart. O brother, run, I pray you, and join yourself to that yoke, and bear it with Jesus, lift it up with Jesus! Isaiah says:

*I looked about, and there was none to help;*

*I sought, and there was none to give aid*. [Is 63.5]

Help him, then, brother! Help Jesus, because if you become a sharer in his trials, you will also share in his consolations.

We ask you, then, Lord Jesus, to make us humble poor men, truthful rich men, wise old men: so that we may be fit to come to your eternal delights and riches. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A theme for a sermon on the six things necessary for the penitent*: With three things is my spirit pleased*.)**

10. There follows, secondly:

*The publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes towards heaven; but he struck his breast, saying: O God, be merciful to me a sinner. I say to you, this man went down unto his house justified rather than the other; because every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*. [Lk 18.13-14]

There are six things to note in this clause: the recollection of his own wickedness, the humbling of his mind and heart, contrition, confession, satisfaction, and the justification of the publican himself.

The recollection of wickedness is expressed by: *The publican, standing afar off*. Conscious of his own wickedness, he stood at a distance, reckoning himself unworthy of actually entering the temple. The Pharisee thought he was near, but he was distant; the publican thought himself distant, but was near. The branch was broken and the wild olive was grafted in [cf. Rom 11.17].

*That which Israel sought, he hath not obtained; but the election hath obtained it*. [Rom 11.7]

Stand, sinner, stand afar off, and think yourself unworthy. Say with Abraham:

*I will speak to the Lord, wheareas I am dust and ashes*. [Gen 18.27]

The humility of mind and body is expressed by: *He would not even lift up his eyes to heaven*. The distinguishing mark of humility is usually shown in the eyes. Ecclesiasticus says:

*Give me not haughtiness of my eyes*; [Ecclus 23.5]

and St Augustine[5] says, "The shameless eye is herald of the shameless heart."

Further, in striking his breast he expresses three things: contrition, by the striking; confession, by the sound it made; satisfaction in deeds, by his hand. He said*: O God, be merciful to me a sinner*; be reconciled. The publican, like a humble man, would not dare to draw near, and so God drew near to him. He would not look up, so God looked upon him. He struck his breast, inflicting punishment on himself, so God spared him. He confessed, and God forgave him. God forgave what he acknowledged. Attend, and look carefully at the concord the penitent had with himself. Humility shone forth in his mind, and humility dwelt in his eyes. His heart grieved for what he had done, his hand struck, his tongue cried out: O God, be merciful to me a sinner.

11. There is a **concordance** to this concord in Ecclesiasticus:

*With three things my spirit is pleased, which are approved before God and men:*

*The **concord** of brethren, and the love of neighbours,*

*and a man and wife that agree well together*. [Ecclus 25.1-2]

Let us see what is meant by the brethren, the neighbours, and man and wife. The ‘brethren’ are the five bodily senses, of which Genesis says:

*Juda, thee shall thy brethren praise*. [Gen 49.8]

They are Ruben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar and Zabulon. Juda is the penitent, and when his five bodily senses are in **concord** together, they give him praise- that is, they make him praiseworthy. Ruben means ‘vision’, and represents sight. Simeon means ‘hearing’, and represents it. Levi is ‘taken up’, representing the sense of smell whereby we take up the air we breathe. Issachar is ‘remembrance of the Lord’, that is, the tongue whereby the penitent should be mindful both to confess sin and praise the Lord. Zabulon, ‘dwelling of strength’, is touch. The **concord** of these brethren is pleasing to God and men. ‘**Concord**’ means a joining of hearts; to be **concordant** means to be of one heart.

There follows: the love of neighbours. These neighbours are the affections of the mind, nearest of all to us. If the love of God is among them, so that they are directed towards God and love God, then this is pleasing to God. And a man and wife that agree well

together. The husband is the reason, the wife is the sensual nature. If these agree in the fear and love of God, then they will receive whatever they ask for. If two of you agree, it will be done for you [cf. Mt 18.19].

It was because there was such **concord**, love and agreement in the publican that the Lord said of him, I say to you, this man went down unto his house justified rather than the other- that is, rather than the Pharisee. St Bernard[6] says here, "The publican, who emptied himself and took care to show himself as an empty vessel, received a fuller grace." See how great the Redeemer's grace is: the publican went up defiled and came down justified, he went up a sinner and came down a saint. So, in the Introit of today's Mass, he cries out confidently:

*O God, come to my assistance*, [Ps 69.2]

that is, *Be merciful to me, a sinner*;

*O Lord, make haste to help me*,

by pouring in your grace, so that I may go down justified.

**(A moral theme on humility: *Everyone that exalteth himself*.)**

12. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause:

*I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But, by the grace of God, I am what I am. And his grace in me hath not been void*. [1Cor 15.9-10]

Nothing can be less than the least. See how St Paul, the least, and the humble publican are concordant. The latter thought himself unworthy and stood afar off; the former reckoned himself least of the apostles. The latter would not lift up his eyes to heaven, because he had sinned before heaven and before God; the former said, I am not worthy to be called an apostle. The latter accused himself as a sinner; the former, that he had persecuted the Church of God. The latter found grace, and so did the former, who said, By the grace of God, I am what I am.

Let us then, dearest brothers, ask the Lord Jesus Christ, who forgave the sins of the publican and of Saul, and bestowed grace on them, to forgive us and bestow grace on us, that we may attain to his glory. May he grant this, who is blessed and glorious, life and salvation, just and kindly, for ever and ever. Let every humble soul say: Amen. Alleluia.

**(On the true penitent, and on the nature of bees: *The memory of Josias*.)**

13. *Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled: and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*. Ecclesiasticus says:

*The memory of Josias is like the composition of a sweet smell made by the art of a perfumer;*

*his remembrance shall be sweet as honey in the mouth,*

*and as music at a banquet of wine*. [Ecclus 42.1-2]

Josias means ‘one in whom is sacrifice’, and he represents the penitent or the just man, in whom is that sacrifice to God which is a broken heart [cf.Ps 50.19]. His life is compared to the work of a perfumer, to the sweetness of honey, and to an instrument of music. The true penitent, like a perfumer, crushes in the mortar of his heart, with the pestle of contrition, all kinds of thoughts, words and deeds, and reduces them to the finest powder, which he mixes with the balm of tears. This is the composition of a sweet smell, the work of the perfumer which is compared to the sweetness of honey.

Note that bees gather wax from flowers, taking it in their fore-legs and passing it to the middle legs, and thence to the joints of the hind-legs. Then they fly with it, and you can see how heavy it is. When a bee flies, it does not visit different kinds of flowers, nor does it leave one flower and go to another, but it collects what it needs from one flower and returns to the hive. There it works, and lives on what it makes. A penitent, too, has six ‘legs’. The first pair are the love of God and neighbour, the middle are prayer and abstinence, the hinder are patience and perseverance. The flowers are the examples of the holy fathers, from which he should gather ‘wax’- purity of mind and body- gathering it with these six ‘legs’ and returning to the ‘hive’ of his own conscience, to work upon it inwardly and refresh himself with the fruit of this inner working. As the Lord says: *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto life everlasting* [Jn 6.27]. The work of a just man is like the sweetness of honey: purity of conscience, honesty of life, the fragrance of good repute, and joy in divine contemplation.

You who meddle in many matters [cf. Ecclus 11.10], go not to the ant, I say [cf. Prov 6.6], but to the bee, to learn wisdom. The bee does not visit different kinds of flower; likewise you should not go to the varied flowers of words and all kinds of books; nor should you leave one flower and go to another, like the dabblers who are always changing books and reading sermons and weighing words: but never attaining wisdom! Gather what you need from one, and store it in the hive of your memory. The Philosopher[7] says: "A plant that is always being moved will not flourish. There is nothing so useful that it improves with moving."

Again, the life of the just man is compared to an instrument of music. This musical instrument is the word of Gospel preaching, the melody of good repute harmonising with

a holy life. From such a life comes a sweet-scented memory that delights the minds of those who hear, as it sounds sweetly in their ears.

**(On humility and on the nature of the camel: *Everyone that humbleth himself*; and: *I went out by the gate of the Valley*.)**

14. Regarding the humility of this Josias, the penitent who humbles himself with the publican, the Lord says: *Every one that humbleth himself shall be exalted*. The humble man as it were stoops to the ground. Heaven's gate is low, and whoever wants to enter by it must stoop down. The Lord taught this when he bowed his head and gave up his spirit [cf. Jn 19.30]. He says:

*It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle,*

*than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*. [Mk 10.25]

Literally, the 'needle's eye' was a certain gate in Jerusalem. The camel is taught by nature to stoop down when passing through a low place, and to walk on its knees. That is why it has padded knees, so as not to hurt them when it walks on them. It is easier, then, for a camel to pass through, because a camel can lower itself by nature, whereas a rich man can do so only by grace.

To explain this stooping down to us, there was a certain gate in Jerusalem called the Valley Gate, of which Nehemiah says:

*I went out by night by the Gate of the Valley, and before the Dragon fountain, and to the Dung Gate: and I viewed the wall of Jerusalem which was broken down, and the gates thereof which were consumed by fire.. And I passed to the Gate of the Fountain, and to the king's aqueduct; and there was no place for the beast on which I rode to pass... And I came to the Gate of the Valley, and returned*. [Neh 2.13-15]

The Gate of the Valley is our entrance into the world, when we go out to see it. The Dragon Fountain is the fountain of tears. The Dung Gate is penitence, through which the dung of sin is carried out. Then we consider the breach in the spiritual wall, made by sin; and the gates consumed by fire, which are the senses corrupted by sin. The Gate of the Fountain is contemplation, to which we pass after doing penance. The aqueduct is the contemplative soul, through which flow the waters of understanding. The beast for which there is no room is the body, whose heaviness pulls men down from heavenly contemplation; for, *the corruptible body is a load upon the soul* [Wisd 9.15]. And so we must return to the Gate of the Valley, because we must persevere in humility. Ecclesiasticus says: Humble thy spirit very much; for *the vengeance on the flesh of the ungodly is fire and worms* [Ecclus 7.19]. The flesh of the ungodly means carnal and ungodly people.

So the Lord says in Ezekiel:

*In the fire of my rage will I blow upon thee, and will give thee into the hands of men that are brutish and contrive thy destruction*. [Ezek 21.31-32]

And in Judith:

*He will give fire and worms into their flesh, that they may burn and may feel for ever*. [Jud 16.21]

Humble your spirit, then, because, as Ecclesiasticus says:

*The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds;*

*and till it come nigh he will not be comforted*. [Ecclus 35.21]

Origen[8] says, "One saint praying is worth more than many sinners fighting. The prayer of the saint penetrates heaven: how can it fail to overcome earthly enemies?" Augustine[9] says, "There is great power in pure prayer, which is like a person entering God's presence, and doing what he commands. The flesh cannot come there." And Gregory[10] says, "To pray truly is not just to send forth words; but bitter groans of compunction." Humble your spirit, then, because every one that humbles himself will be exalted. Ecclesiasticus says:

*He hath lifted him up from his low estate, and hath exalted his head from tribulation, and many have wondered at him*. [Ecclus 11.13]

NOTES

[1] *BREVIARIUM ROMANUM*, Lauds Hymn in Passiontide

[2] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Lk 18.12

[3] GREGORY, *Moralia* XX,15,40; PL 76.161

[4] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Ps 48.19

[5] AUGUSTINE, *Regula*, 6; PL 32.1381

[6] BERNARD, *In festo Annuntiationis, sermo* 3,10; PL 183.398

[7] SENECA, *Epistola* 2

[8] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Num 31.4

[9] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Ps 87.3

[10] GREGORY, *Moralia* XXXIII,22,43; PL 76.701

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost: *Jesus, going out of the coasts of Tyre*, which is divided into two clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a theme for a sermon on the preacher and prelate of the Church, and on the nature of bees, and the properties of iron: *The smith sitting by the anvil*.)**

1. At that time: *Going out of the coasts of Tyre, Jesus came by Sidon to the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis*. [Mk 7.31]

It says in Ecclesiasticus:

*The smith sitting by the anvil and considering the iron work.*

*The vapour of the fire wasteth his flesh:*

*and he fighteth with the heat of the furnace.*

*The noise of the hammer is always in his ears;*

*and his eye is upon the pattern of the vessel he maketh.*

*He setteth his mind to finish his work,*

*and his watching to polish them to perfection*. [Ecclus 38.29-31]

The blacksmith who works in iron represents the holy preacher of the Church, who makes spiritual weapons. He should sit by the anvil, the study and exercise of Holy Scripture, to exercise himself in what he preaches. We beat upon the anvil, shaping with our blows, striking and beating hard. Natural History teaches that bees fly in the air as if to exercise themselves; then they return to the hive and feed. In the same way, preachers should first exercise themselves in the air of contemplation, with a desire for heavenly blessedness, so that afterwards they may eagerly feed themselves and others with the bread of God’s word.

He must consider the iron-work, the iron mind of his hearers, so that from it he may fashion the weapons of virtue, to fight against the powers of the air. With iron we strike and subdue others; with iron we till the soil to bring forth fruit. Steel (in Greek, *chalybs*) is named after the river Chalybs, where iron is tempered to the finest and keenest edge. Iron will not rust if it is coated with white-lead, gypsum and liquid pitch; or if it is coated with deer-marrow, or with white-lead mixed with rose-oil. White-lead is a material used by painters, composed of tin and lead. Gypsum (a Greek word) is like chalk, and most suitable for signs and embellishments on buildings. Likewise note that the iron of the human mind is tempered to the finest edge in the river of tears. It will be free from the rust of sin if it is coated with 'white-lead' and the other things. We must now see what these things signify: white-lead, gypsum, pitch, deer-marrow and rose-oil.

White-lead is made from tin and lead, and it represents the Humanity of Christ. This was 'tin-like' in the Nativity, as Zechariah says:

*They shall rejoice and shall see the tin stone in the hand of Zorobabel*. [Zech 4.10]

The tin-stone represents the divine and human nature which our Zorobabel, Jesus Christ, had in the hand of his power. 'Lead' refers to the Passion, as Jeremiah said:

*The bellows have failed, the lead is consumed in the fire*. [Jer 6.29]

(On this, see the first clause of the Gospel: *I am going to him who sent me* [Easter IV]). 'Gypsum' is the spotless life of the saints; 'pitch' is humility and poverty; 'deer-marrow' is mercifulness towards our neighbour; and 'rose-oil' is bodily chastity. Whoever coats the iron of his mind with all these will assuredly be totally free of the rust of sin; so it is well said: *considering the iron work*.

There follows: *the vapour of fire wasteth his flesh*. The vapour of fire is the fervour of holy zeal, which should burn away the flesh (the carnality) of the preacher or prelate. As the Apostle says, Who is weak and I am not weak? [2Cor 11.29]. *And he fighteth with the heat of the furnace*, that is, he battles against the temptation of the flesh, and its vices.

*The noise of the hammer*, etc. When the metal has been heated and softened, the hammer strikes it and shapes it. The hammer is God's word, of which Jeremiah says:

*Are not my words as a fire, and as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?* [Jer 23.29]

When the preacher strikes the mass of iron with this hammer, he inflicts the fear of torment, and his own hearing should be changed by the impact. Woe to him who strikes others, and remains insensible himself. He should say with Isaiah, *Shall not I, that make others bring forth groans of compunction, myself bring forth?* [cf. Is 66.9]. Shall not I

groan? Or else the hammer may ring out, *Depart, ye cursed* [Mt 25.41], which should always echo in the ears of the heart. So the text implies a change, or renewal, since he should always have a 'newness' in view.

*His eye is on the pattern of the vessel*. The preacher's gaze (his 'eye') should be on the pattern of the vessels, chosen souls, so that he may make more similar. He shapes according to a pattern. *He setteth his mind to finish his work*, so that he may say with the Lord, *I have finished the work thou gavest me to do* [Jn 17.4]. *And his watch to polish them to perfection*: he should bring the imperfection of souls to his own perfection, curing the deaf and dumb with the finger of holy action and the spittle of divine preaching, as in today's Gospel: *Jesus, going out of the coasts of Tyre*, etc.

2. There are two things to note in today's Gospel: The going out of Jesus from the region of Tyre, and the healing of the deaf and dumb man. The first begins, *Jesus, going out of the coasts of Tyre*. The second continues, *And they bring to him one deaf and dumb*. We shall **concord** with these clauses some texts of Ecclesiasticus.

In the Introit of today's Mass we sing: *Have regard to thy covenant, O Lord*. The Epistle of blessed Paul to the Corinthians is read: *Such confidence we have*, which we will divide into two parts and **concord** with the two clauses of the holy Gospel The first part is: *Having such confidence*. The second is: *Who also hath made us fit*.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(On the sin of lust and pride, and on the nature of serpents, and the three ways that the avaricious extort: *My son, hast thou sinned?*)**

3. Let us say, then:

*Going out of the coasts of Tyre, Jesus came by Sidon to the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis*. [Mk 7.31]

Allegorically. Tyre means 'narrowness', and it stands for Judea, to which the Lord said in Isaiah:

*The bed is straitened, the covering is short, and it cannot cover both*.[cf. Is 28.20]

So, *Arise and let us go hence* [Jn 14.3]. And going from there *he came by Sidon*, which means 'hunting'; that is, he came by the preaching of the Apostles, to whom he says in Jeremiah:

*I will send my hunters, and they shall hunt them*. [cf. Jer 16.16]

*He came to the sea of Galilee*, meaning 'a wheel'. That is, he passed to the Gentiles who

were in the bitter sea of sin, and on the wheel of temporal things. *Through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis*. The Decapolis was a region of ten cities, across the Jordan. It represents the ten Commandments, which the Lord gave the nations to observe.

Literally. Mark does not say that Jesus entered the region of Decapolis, nor that he crossed the sea. He says that he came to the sea, to a place which looked towards the middle of the Decapolis region, situated far across the sea.

Let us see what is the moral significance of Tyre and its borders, of Sidon, of the sea of Galilee, and of the Decapolis. The journey is made from the borders of Tyre to the sea of Galilee, by way of Sidon. This represents the journey of life, the path of righteousness of which Isaiah says:

*The way of the just is made right: the path of the just is right to walk in.* [Is 25.7]

Tyre means ‘narrowness’, and Sidon the ‘hunting of sorrow’. Tyre is the world, to whose narrowness there is a **concordance** in Ecclesiasticus:

*My son, hast thou sinned? Do so no more:*

*but for thy former sins also pray that they may be forgiven thee.*

*Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent:*

*for if thou comest near them, they will take hold of thee.*

*The teeth thereof are the teeth of a lion, killing the souls of men.*

*All iniquity is like a two-edged sword:*

*there is no remedy for the wound thereof.* [Ecclus 21.1-4]

Note these three: the serpent, the lion’s teeth, the sword. The serpent stands for lust, the lion’s teeth for avarice, and the sword for pride.

The serpent loves the shade, and is slippery. It flees from a deer, but kills a lion; and it signifies lust, which loves shadows and lives in shady people- the luke-warm and the lazy. It easily slides into the soul, so that its head may not be crushed. Therefore, "nip it in the bud." It flees from a deer (a humble penitent), because he flees from it; Fly fornication [1Cor 6.18]. But it kills a lion, the proud man. Before being ruined by lust, the heart is built up by pride, *the root of all sin* [cf. Prov 18.12; Ecclus 10.15].

Teeth are what we chew our food with. The front teeth are called incisors, the next canines, and then molars. And note that avaricious greed is of three kinds. Some bite in

such a way as to take just a part, not the whole. Others are like the canine teeth: lawyers and legal experts who for a fee will bark like dogs in any cause. Others are like molars, the powerful and the usurers who grind the poor. But:

*The Lord will break the teeth of sinners and the grinders of the lions*. [cf. Ps 57.7]

The sword, sharpened at both edges, (commonly called a ‘spade’) is pride which kills the soul with a double death. Fly, then, the serpent of lust, the teeth of avarice and the sword of pride. These are the borders of Tyre, in which is narrowness and affliction of spirit. Solomon says of it, in Proverbs:

*The eyes of fools are in the ends of the earth*. [Prov 17.24]

Boundaries divide areas of land; those bound in the toils of sin are divided from the portion of the saints.

**(Against prelates of the Church: *Her feet shall carry Tyre afar off*.)**

4. Isaiah says of this Tyre:

*Her feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn.*

*Who hath taken this counsel against Tyre, that was formerly crowned,*

*whose merchants were princes, and her traders the nobles of the earth?*

*The Lord of hosts hath designed it, to pull down the pride of all glory*

*and bring to disgrace all the glorious ones of the earth*. [Is 23.7-9]

Tyre is the world, crowned with a crown of pride, dignity and excellence. Her ‘merchants’ are princes, the prelates of the Church, of whom the Apocalypse says: *Thy merchants were the princes of the earth* [Apoc 18.23]. These are the Ismaelite merchants who, as Genesis tells, sold Joseph into Egypt. The true Joseph, Jesus Christ, is sold today by merchant archbishops, bishops and other prelates of the Church. They run to and fro, they buy and sell and sell again truth for lies, and oppress justice with their simonies. Remember that we use the term ‘business’ sometimes to refer to a legal action or lawsuit, and sometimes for any activity as opposed to idleness. It is ‘busy-ness’, as opposed to idleness. The businessman is busy about his trade.

The ‘traders’ are hypocritical abbots and priors and false religious, who under a cloak of religion sell the false goods of fake holiness in the market-place of worldly vanity, for the coin of human praise. Tyre, then, with her traders and merchants, will be led into captivity: but how? Indeed, by her own feet on which she now runs about. They will be

the means by which she is carried off to sojourn in the exile of hell. Who could have thought it, that the princes and nobles of the earth, prelates and religious who seem to speak with God face to face, who have the keys of the kingdom of heaven, should be led off to the exile of eternal death? And so the damned, their subjects and parishioners, will say to the prelates damned in hell:

*Thou also art wounded as well as we; thou art become like us.*

*Thy pride is brought down to hell, thy carcass is fallen down.*

*Under thee shall the moth be strewed, and worms shall be thy covering*. [Is 14.10-11]

That is the kind of bed that bishops, prelates, abbots and false religious will have, who now (as Amos says) *sleep upon beds of ivory, and are wanton on your couches* [Am 6.4], just like horses and cattle in the fields. The Lord of hosts has known this, that he might pull down to hell all the proud glory of prelates, and lead down to the ignominy of eternal shame all the nobles of the earth, who are as haughty as hawks, and as fine-feathered as herons, but will go crawling on their bellies. Ecclesiasticus says: *A greater punishment is ready for the more mighty* [Wisd 6.9]. So, lest the just man who is a member of Jesus Christ should be led a-wandering with faithless Tyre, let him go out, I pray, with Jesus Christ from the borders of Tyre; as it is said: Jesus, going out of the coasts of Tyre.

There follows: *He came by Sidon to the sea of Galilee*. Regarding the meaning of Sidon, see in the Gospel: *Jesus went from there and retired into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon* [Lent II(B)]. Galilee means ‘passing through’. The sea of Galilee is the bitterness of penance, through which we pass from vice to virtue, and from virtue to greater virtue. Regarding the bitterness of penance, see the Gospel of the five loaves [Lent IV].

There follows: *In the midst of the coasts of Decapolis*. Decapolis means ‘ten cities’, and it was a region containing ten towns. These ten cities are the ten virtues which Ecclesiasticus enumerates in praise of Simon son of Onias.

**(A moral sermon on the life of the just man, and on the properties of clouds, the sun and the rainbow, on a rainy day: *Simon the son of Onias*, etc.)**

5. *Simon, the high priest, the son of Onias...*

*shone in his days as the morning star in the midst of a cloud,*

*and as the moon at the full.*

*And as the sun when it shineth, so did he shine in the temple of God:*

*and as the rainbow giving light in the bright clouds,*

*and as the flower of roses in the days of spring,*

*and as the lilies that are on the brink of the water,*

*and as the sweet-smelling frankincense in the time of summer...*

*and as a massy vessel of gold, adorned with every precious stone.*

*As an olive tree budding forth,*

*and a cypress-tree rearing itself on high*. [Ecclus 50.1,6-8,10-11]

(We omit two items from the passage, *As a bright fire, and frankincense burning in the fire*, because these seem to be included in the shining sun and the sweet-smelling frankincense. From this text we can derive a sermon for any feast of holy Mary, and for the feast of an apostle, a martyr or a confessor.)

Simon means ‘hearing sadness’, and he stands for the just man who, whether eating, drinking or doing anything else, hears in the grief of his heart that terrible trumpet-call: Arise, you dead, and come to the judgement of the Lord. He is called ‘son of Onias’ (‘sorrowing to the Lord’). He is a son of that sorrow in which alone he seeks to please the Lord. The title ‘priest’ (someone who deals in holy things) is a fitting one, since he offers himself to the Lord in an odour of sweetness. Note carefully, too, that the life of a holy man is said to resemble the morning star, the moon, the sun, the rainbow, the rose, the lily, sweet-smelling incense, a gold vessel, a budding olive, and a cypress-tree. Behold the Decapolis, the region of ten cities of which the Gospel says: *and you shall be over ten cities* [Lk 19.17].

The life of the just man is *like the morning star in the midst of a cloud*, that is, in the midst of worldly vanity. When cloud covers the ground, we fear thieves. When it disperses, the sun shines with renewed brightness. When you touch it, you feel nothing. When clouds arise, it is a sign of stormy weather. When they depart, it means calm weather. A cloud seems to be a very great thing: one minute it covers the whole earth, next minute you do not know where it has gone! Worldly vanity is just the same. A thief (the devil, or sin) can hid amid worldly splendour, and so the just man is much afraid when he experiences the smile of temporal blessings. Fly, you just man! "There is a snake hiding in the grass," there is a thief hiding in the cloud!

When this cloud disperses, when the empty show of the world is despised, the sun of grace shines more brightly. As the prophet says:

*Unto you that fear God, the sun of justice shall arise*. [cf. Mal 4.2]

When you try to touch it, there is nothing there. As the psalm says:

*They have slept their sleep:*

*and all the men of riches have found nothing in their hands*. [Ps 75.6]

It says 'men of riches' rather than 'riches of men', because they are slaves to money! When the clouds gather, it is a sign of stormy weather. When worldly glory lifts you up, it is a sign of your damnation! St Augustine says, "There is no surer sign of eternal damnation than to have worldly wealth at your beck and call." When the clouds roll away it means fair weather, the perfection referred to in the text, If you would be perfect [Mt 19.21].

A cloud looks big. Someone established in worldly glory looks more important than he is, just like a balloon full of wind looks big; but the pin-prick of death will show how insignificant he is. A cloud can cover the entire earth, making it dull and overcast. The damp valleys breathe out mist. Alas, the whole earth is covered with a cloud that prevents men seeing clearly. The psalmist says:

*They are covered with their iniquity against God,*

*and their wickedness towards their neighbour*. [Ps 72.6]

And Job:

*Fatness* (the abundance of temporal things) *hath covered his face,*

*and his fat* (riches) *hangeth down in his sides*. [Job 15.27]

At one moment the cloud covers the earth, the next minute you do not know where it has gone. As Job says:

*If his pride mount up even to heaven, and his head touch the clouds:*

*in the end he shall be destroyed like a dung-hill,*

*and they that had seen him shall say: Where is he?*

*As a dream that fleeth away he shall not be found, he shall pass on as a vision of the night.*

*The eyes that had seen him shall see him no more,*

*neither shall his place any more behold him.* [Job 20.6-9]

The glory of a sinner is like dung [cf. 1Mac 2.62], but the glory of the just man is like the morning star in the midst of a cloud: Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees, Lot in the midst of Sodom, Job, *brother of dragons and ostriches* [Job 30.29], Daniel in the lions' den.

6. There follows: *as the moon at the full*. The full moon shines all night long; and the just man sees all kinds of sin, and suffers with all of them.

And: *as the sun when it shineth*, Just as motes become visible in the rays of the sun, so our defects are shown up by the life of the just man. A mote is the tiniest speck of dust, but in the sun's rays it becomes visible. Why do we blind men not see our defects? Because we do not gaze upon the bright life of the saints. Job saw these motes when he said: *I shall look upon men and shall say: I have sinned* [Job 33.27]. The sun draws even drops of water to itself, and the just man converts little ones to God. The sun gives light, it is hot and round; the just man gives light to his neighbour, he is warm towards God, and well-rounded in his life. This is what the Apostle says: *We should live soberly and justly and godly in this world* [Tit 2.12].

And: *as the rainbow giving light in the bright clouds*. A rainbow is caused by the refraction of the sun's rays in a watery cloud. This watery cloud is the just man, moist with compassion for his neighbour and with damp tears. He receives the rays of the true sun in himself, and then like a cloud sheds the rain of doctrine upon others. The rainbow's spectrum extends from red to purple, the red being the love of God, the purple being compassion for one's neighbour. The rainbow shines in the bright clouds, and the just man, though 'cloudy' in men's eyes, and despised, is bright to God.

And: *as the flower of roses in the days of spring*. There are two characteristics of the rose, its thorns and its sweet scent. The thorn pricks, the flower delights. So the life of the just man contains the thorn of compunction and the scent of delight; and this is in the days of spring, because he rejoices in adversity just as in time of prosperity.

And: *as the lilies that are on the brink of the water*. Lilies represent purity of mind and body, as Canticles says:

*My beloved is gone down into his garden... to gather lilies.*

*I to my beloved, and my beloved to me, who feedeth among the lilies*. [Cant 6.1-2]

There is always something growing in a garden. Whereas other ground brings forth fruit once a year, a garden is never without some fruit. The soul of the just man is a garden that continually bears fruit, and is never unfruitful. The beloved goes down into his garden, when the Son of God infuses grace into the soul, and takes his rest in its inward and outward purity. I belong to my beloved, says the just soul, and he belongs to me: *The Lord is the portion of my inheritance* [Ps 15.5]. He is my inheritance, and I am his.

The lilies are on the brink of the water, that is, of this fallen world, because the just man keeps his purity of life even in the midst of temporal abundance.

And: *as the sweet-smelling frankincense in the time of summer*. The incense-tree is cut in summer to prepare for the autumn gathering. Likewise, the just man is troubled in this present world, but in the world to come he will receive the fruit of eternal life. Regarding this, see more fully in the sermon: *My house shall be called a house of prayer* [Pentecost X].

And: *as a massy vessel of gold*. The hollowness of a vessel enables it to hold what is poured into it; likewise, humility of heart in a just man makes him capable of receiving grace. A convex shape repels what is poured upon it. The just man is indeed a massy vessel of gold: a vessel because he is humble, of gold because he is bright and precious, massy because he is *full of the solid hope of immortality* [cf. Wisd 3.4]. He is also *adorned with every precious stone*, that is, every kind of virtue.

And: *as an olive tree budding forth*. An olive because he is merciful, budding forth because to himself the just man always seems to be a beginner. 'Budding' suggests a joyful fruiting: *The Lord loveth a cheerful giver* [2Cor 9.7].

And: *as a cypress-tree rearing itself on high*. The cypress is a tall tree with a rounded top. This top is the mind of the just man, rising up in the roundness of divine love, lifted up in the height of contemplation.

Blessed is the man who dwells in these ten cities. These are the cities of refuge, and whoever flees to them will be saved [cf. Dt 19.2-3]. So, if you go out with Jesus from the coasts of Tyre, and come by Sidon to the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis, you will be able to say like blessed Paul in today's Epistle:

*Such confidence we have, through Christ, towards God. Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God*. [2Cor 3.4-5]

Only the man who goes out with him from the coasts of Tyre can have confidence towards God through Jesus Christ. Contempt for earthly things gives birth to confidence in eternal things. The grace which goes before us and follows us is from him alone; so the Apostle adds: *not that we are sufficient to think anything* (anything good) *as if it were our own*, protecting us because it originated in us; *but our sufficiency is from God*.

**(On the five rivers and their meaning, and on the three parts of an arrow: *Who filleth up as Phison*.)**

7. There is a **concordance** to this in Ecclesiasticus:

*Who filleth up Wisdom as the Phison, and as the Tigris in the days of new fruits.*

*Who maketh understanding to abound as the Euphrates,*

*who multiplieth it as the Jordan in the time of harvest.*

*Who sendeth knowledge as the light,*

*and riseth up as Gehon in the time of the vintage*. [Ecclus 24.35-37]

Five rivers are mentioned here, to denote every perfection in this world and in heaven. The way of perfection has three stages, beginners, proficients and perfects. Phison means ‘change of mouth’, Tigris ‘arrow’ and Euphrates ‘fertile’.

Jesus Christ is like Phison to beginners, those who a short time before spoke the language of Egypt, but now speak the language of Canaan (‘exchange’). Before, their faces were darkened by the sun, but now they are bright. Just as the river Phison abounds and floods, so Christ makes wisdom to abound in beginners, so that they relish the things of God, who previously *relished the things of the flesh* [cf. Rom 8.5].

He is like the Tigris to proficients, in the days of new growth and bearing seed. It is then that the Tigris overflows. An arrow has three parts: the wooden shaft, the iron tip, the feathered flight which makes it fly straight. Christ wounds the hearts of penitents with the wood of his Passion, the iron of fear and the feather of his love; and daily they progress, and like the good seed they grow from virtue to virtue, every day.

He is like the Euphrates to the perfect, whose senses are full of fertile virtues. In the Epistle to the Hebrews the Apostle says:

*Strong meat is for the perfect; for them who by custom have their senses exercised to the discerning of good and evil*. [Heb 5.14]

We should note that the perfection of heaven consists in three things: the glorification of the soul, and of the body, and the vision of God Three and One. Thus we may say: *Who multiplieth the Jordan in the time of harvest*. The Jordan rises from two springs, which stand for the double robe of overflowing glory. The time of harvest is eternal happiness. The Jordan is said to multiply waters, because in the time of harvest it flows with a great volume of water, increasing its waters when other streams are failing. It will be like that in eternal bliss. The delights of evil men will fail, but robe upon robe of eternal glory will be multiplied for the blessed.

God will then be to us like Gehon, illuminating the Church Triumphant with the Vision of himself, there in his presence, and making it fruitful, and satisfying it in the time of vintage (regarding which, see the first clause of the Gospel: *A certain man made a great supper* [Pentecost II]. The Apostle says well, then: *Our sufficiency is from God*.

We ask you, then, Lord Jesus, to make us go out from Tyre, and come by Sidon to the sea of penitence, amid the region of Decapolis; and to make us so abound in the perfection appropriate to this life's journey, that we may be made fit to go up to the perfection of glory. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A theme for a sermon on the human heart, and the bodily senses: *The king that sitteth on the throne*.)**

8. There follows, secondly:

*And they bring to him one deaf and dumb; and they besought him that he would lay his hand upon him. And, taking him from the multitude apart, he put his fingers into his ears: and spitting, he touched his tongue. And, looking up to heaven, he groaned and said to him: Ephphetha, which is, Be thou opened. And immediately his ears were opened and the string of his tongue was loosed*. [Mk 7.32-35]

Let us see what is the moral significance of the deaf and dumb man, the hand of Jesus, the taking from the multitude apart, the fingers, the spittle and the groaning of Jesus. Deafness arises from the reception of unclean fluids in the ears. Dumbness is the inability to enunciate words, but to make only a senseless noise, the emission of the voice through the nose, like the bellowing of an animal. Solomon testifies that *life issues from the heart of a man* [cf. Prov 20.8]; which is a well-spring of heat that gives life to the limbs, and nourishes them.

The heart is like a king, ruling and organizing the city of the body, as Ecclesiasticus says:

*The king, that sitteth on the throne of judgement, scattereth away all evil with his look*. [Prov 20.8]

A throne is a firmly based seat: when the heart of man is at rest, sitting upon a throne of firmness and constancy, it scatters all evil and malice of the body with its look, its discretion. This king has five special ministers, the five bodily senses. Of these, two are particularly important and close to him, the ears and the tongue. By his ears, he knows what is going on around him; with his tongue he expresses his inner thoughts. Thus Ruth said to Boaz:

*Thou hast spoken to the heart of thy handmaid*. [Ruth 2.13]

and Isaiah:

*Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem*. [Is 40.2]

and the Psalm:

*The mouth of the just shall meditate wisdom*; [Ps 36.30]

that is, shall speak the wisdom he has meditated. But if the ears are blocked up with filth, and the tongue is tied, what shall that king, the heart, do? His kingdom is destroyed, because the ministers by whom the business of the kingdom, the secret plans and royal decrees, are carried out are destroyed. What is to be done, then? Only one course of action remains: to take the deaf and dumb man to Jesus, and ask him to lay his hand upon him.

The king is the human spirit, the ears are obedience, the tongue is confession. Regarding the ears of obedience, Job says:

*With the hearing of the ear, I have heard thee: but now my eye seeth thee.*

*Therefore I reprehend myself, and do penance in dust and ashes.* [Job 42.5-6]

In this text there are five things to note: obedience, contemplation, confession, satisfaction, and the remembrance of our lowliness and weakness.

9. Obedience is expressed by: *With the hearing of the ear, I have heard thee*. The sense of hearing receives the vibration of the air. The ear takes it in readily. I hear, I perceive with my ears. Obedience is 'respectful listening'. When the voice of your superior (as it were 'air', with nothing earthly about it) vibrates in your ear, you should hear not just with your ear, but with the sense of hearing in your ear, and the affection of your inmost heart. You should say with Samuel: *Speak, Lord, your servant is listening* [1Kg(Sm) 3.10]

Contemplation is expressed by: *But now my eye seeth thee*. You will not see unless you are obedient. If you are deaf, you will be blind too. Obey with the affection of your heart, so that you may see with the eye of contemplation. As Ecclesiasticus says:

*God set their eye upon their hearts*. [cf. Ecclus 17.7]

God sets the eye upon the heart when from an obedient heart he infuses the light of contemplation. Zechariah says:

*The Lord is the eye of man and of all the tribes of Israel*. [Zech 9.1]

When the first man was obedient in paradise, the Lord was his eye; so:

*Having formed out of the ground all the beasts of the earth, and all the fowls of the air, he brought them to Adam to see* (i.e. to make him see) *what he would call them*.[Gen 2.19]

But when he was disobedient, it was not God but the devil who was his blinded eye:

*The woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold:*

*and she took of the fruit thereof and did eat*.[Gen 3.6]

‘All the tribes of Israel’ means penitents, who, as long as they are wholeheartedly obedient to their superiors, are the true Israel which sees God [cf. Gen 32.34].

Confession is expressed by: *Therefore I reprehend myself*- I accuse myself in confession. This was no dumb or deaf man, but one who heard clearly, and rightly reprehended himself. So he says elsewhere, I tear my flesh with my teeth [Job 13.14]. These are the words of a true penitent: I tear my flesh, my carnal nature, with the teeth of my self-accusation. Canticles says:

*Thy teeth as flocks of sheep, that are shorn, which come up from the washing*. [Cant 4.2]

This flock of shorn sheep is the assembly of penitents, who go up from virtue to virtue from the washing of tears, whereby they are made whiter than snow. Let your teeth, brother, be like this flock of shorn sheep: that is, reprehend yourself and do penance, just as they do.

Satisfaction is expressed by: *I do penance*. Penance is, as it were, a penalty; and a man who repents punishes in himself the evil that he has acknowledged. ‘Penance’ and ‘penalty’ are related; by it the soul is afflicted and the flesh mortified.

The remembrance of lowliness and mortality is expressed by: *In dust and ashes*. Ashes are made by fire, and represent the remembrance of our lowliness. Alas! The tall cedar of paradise was burned to ashes by the devil’s fire; so Joel:

*To thee, O Lord, will I cry: because fire hath devoured the beautiful places of the wilderness,*

*and the flame hath burnt all the trees of the country*. [Joel 1.19]

(See the Gospel: *Jesus went out and retired to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon* [Lent II(B)]). Dust represents our mortality: *Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return* [Gen 3.19]. Whoever lacks the affection of obedience and the tongue of confession is truly deaf and dumb. ‘Deaf’ and ‘defile’ sound alike. Jeremiah says in Lamentations:

*Her filthiness is on her feet*. [Lam 1.9]

The ‘feet’ are the affections of the soul, by which she is made deaf when the defilement of vice sticks to them. Isaiah says:

*All tables were full of vomit and filth, so that there was no more place*. [Is 28.8]

Where there is ‘vomit’ (the repetition of sin) there is abominable filth, which so stops up the ears of the heart that there is no more room for obedience. The Lord complains of this deaf man in Isaiah:

*Who is deaf, but he to whom I have sent my messengers?...*

*Thou that hast ears open, wilt thou not hear?* [Is 42.19-20]

Natural History tells us that when a deer’s ears are pricked up, it hears very keenly, and at once knows the hunter that seeks to kill it. But if its ears are down, it hears nothing, and is unaware of the one who kills it. Isaiah says:

*He waketh in the morning: in the morning he wakeneth my ear,*

*that I may hear him as a master*. [Is 50.4]

Awaken your ears like a deer, then, you deaf man! Hear your master, and so become aware of the demon huntsman’s cunning. But if you lower your ears and despise obedience: believe me, you will be slain!

**(On confession: *Out of the midst of the fire, as it were the resemblance of amber*.)**

10. There are some dumb folk who mumble in confession, stammering as they confess their sins, which they are more ashamed to own up to that to commit! St Augustine says, "Shame is the main part of penance." This is a wholesome shame, leading to glory, when someone is ashamed of his sin and, being ashamed, reveals it in confession. So Isaiah says:

*Be thou ashamed, O Sidon: saith the sea*. [Is 23.4]

The sea of inner bitterness brings it about that the man who confesses outwardly feels shame. And so Ezekiel says:

*Out of the midst of the fire, as it were the resemblance of amber*. [Ezek 1.4]

Amber is composed of gold and silver. The red blush of confession is represented by gold, the sound by silver; and so the amber of confession comes from the midst of the fire of contrition. This amber does not belong to the dumb man, of whom it is told that: *They brought to him a deaf and dumb man and besought him to lay his hand on him*.

The hand is the tool of the entire body, and a man's means of defence. It carries food to his mouth, and it does all kinds of work. The 'hand' represents the Word Incarnate, whom the Father has given as the supreme help to the body which is the Church. This help is, first, admonition. This great Gift admonishes us to love the Father who gave it. Isaiah says of this gift:

*As if the children of Israel should bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord*. [Is 66.20]

That is, the children of Israel (the faithful) should bring an offering (faith in the Word Incarnate) in a vessel (a pure heart) into the house of the Lord (Holy Church).

This hand strengthens the Church, and strengthens the soul. As Isaiah says:

*Sion, the city of our strength: a Saviour, a wall and a bulwark, shall be set therein*. [Is 26.1]

A wall is a fortification that protects the city within. Sion (Holy Church) is the city of our strength, and outside it there is no salvation, in it our Saviour has been set as a wall and bulwark; the 'wall' being his divinity and the 'bulwark' his humanity. The Church is strengthened by the Word Incarnate, and remains secure.

This hand bears food to the whole Church. So the Psalm says:

*Thou openest thy hand: and filest with blessing every living creature*. [Ps 144.16]

When Christ extended his hand upon the Cross, and willed that, so extended, it should be opened by the nail, he poured out the treasure of mercy through that opening and filled every living creature with blessing. Every living creature, that is animated and moves by the spirit. Every living creature, meaning every soul animated by the spirit of contrition and moved daily by it from virtue to virtue.

This hand does all kinds of work: creation, restoration, infusion of grace, eternal blessedness. All this is meant by: *They besought him to lay his hand upon him*.

**(A moral sermon on contempt for the world: *Two angels*, etc.)**

11. There follows: *And taking him from the multitude apart*. A 'multitude' suggests an unruly crowd. Someone who is to be cured must be removed from unruly thoughts, undisciplined actions and loose talk. We are told in Genesis that two angels took Lot by the hand, and brought him forth, and set him outside the city [cf. Gen 19.16-17]. These two angels are the fear and the love of God, which still take Lot's hand when they restrain a sinner's deeds, and lead him from the crowd of unruly thoughts, and set him

outside the city of bad habits.

**(On the five fingers of Jesus Christ, and their meaning.**

**A sermon on the Nativity of the Lord: *The potter sitting at his work*.)**

There follows: *He put his fingers into his ears*. The fingers are the proper extensions of the hand. The first is the thumb, stronger than the rest; with the second we point and salute in greeting; the third is the middle finger; the fourth is the ring finger, also called the 'medical' finger because doctors use it to apply ointment; the fifth is the 'ear' finger, because we use it to scratch our ears. We note that the 'hand' of the Incarnate Word also has these five fingers: the 'thumb' being his Conception, the 'pointing' finger his Nativity, the 'middle' his preaching', the 'medical' his working of miracles, and the 'ear' his Passion.

The thumb is shorter than the rest, but stronger. It represents the humility of the Son of God, who constricted himself into the womb of the glorious Virgin. Ecclesiasticus says: *He boweth down his strength before his feet* [Ecclus 38.33]. His 'feet' means his humanity, his 'strength' his divinity: so he humbles and bows down the strength of his divinity before the feet of his humanity. In his birth, the angel pointed out salvation as with a finger, saying:

*This day is born to you a Saviour...*

*and this shall be a sign unto you: you shall find a babe*, etc. [Lk 2.11-12]

The middle finger is his preaching, announcing the kingdom of heaven to all. 'Middle' suggests moderation, measuredness. He measured out the word of life to each, according to their capacities and abilities. The 'medical' finger is the working of miracles. As Ecclesiasticus says:

*Honour the physician for the need thou hast of him*. [Ecclus 38.1]

The 'ear' signifies obedience:

*He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross*, [Phil 2.8]

wherein he completed the work his Father had given him to do [cf. Jn 17.4]. As Ecclesiasticus says:

*The potter sitting at his work, turning the wheel about with his feet,*

*who is always carefully set to his work*. [Ecclus 38.32]

The potter is Jesus Christ, who ‘sits’ (humbles himself) at his ‘work’ (the salvation of mankind), and with the ‘feet’ of his humanity turns the ‘wheel’ of human nature, so that those who had been hastening towards death might hasten towards life. He is always carefully set to his work for us, until the work is completed- as he said at the end: *It is finished* [Jn 19.30]. With these five fingers the Lord healed the deafness of the human race.

**(A sermon on the Nativity, and on the six wings of the Seraphim: *One flew to me*.)**

12. There follows: *And spitting, he touched his tongue*. To spit is to emit saliva, a salty fluid secreted from the head. It is said that if a snake tastes the saliva of a man who is fasting, it dies. We use the term ‘saliva’ when it is in the mouth, ‘spittle’ when it is spat forth. The Lord’s spittle is the savour of Wisdom, which says:

*I came forth from the mouth of the Most High*. [Ecclus 26.5]

The Lord spits upon the tongue of the dumb man, to make him speak; and he touches it in order to shape a mouth, which had long uttered only animal noises in confession of sin, to utter words of wisdom through contact with his holiness. There is something similar in Isaiah, where it says:

*And one of the seraphims flew to me: and in his hand was a live coal, which he had taken with the tongs off the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: Behold, this hath touched thy lips, and thy iniquities shall be taken away, and thy sin shall be cleansed*. [Is 6.6-7]

The two seraphim represent the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Son flew to the Redemption of the human race, so that being Son of God in his divine nature, he might be son of man in his human nature; yet not two sons but one Son. This seraph (as Isaiah himself had already said) had six wings, those six characteristics which the prophet enumerates:

*His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God, the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of peace*. [Is 9.6]

He was Wonderful in his Nativity. As Jeremiah says:

*The Lord will make a new thing on the earth*, etc. [cf. Jer 31.22]

He was Counsellor in his preaching:

*If you would be perfect*, etc. [Mt 19.21]

He was God in working miracles:

*God himself will come and save you.*

*Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.*

*Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall be free*. [Is 35.5-6]

He was Mighty in his Passion, when with hands nailed to the Cross he did battle against the powers of the air. What could be mightier than to conquer one's enemy with hands bound? He was Father of the world to come in the Resurrection. Rising from the dead, he bestowed on us the same hope of rising in the world to come. There he will be like a father to us, taking us to himself as his own children. He will be Prince of peace to us in eternal blessedness, when he will make us *sit down, and passing will minister* to us [cf. Lk 12.37].

There is a **concordance** to these six in Ecclesiasticus, where he says to the Father:

*Renew thy signs, and work new miracles.*

*Glorify thy hand and thy right arm.*

*Raise up indignation and pour out thy wrath.*

*Lift up the adversary and crush the enemy.*

*Haste the time and remember the end*. [Ecclus 36.6-10]

The Father renewed signs and worked new miracles in the Birth of his Son. A sign is a visible thing which has a further meaning to be understood. The first Adam was made of the virgin earth, signifying that the second Adam was to be born of the blessed earth, the Virgin Mary. It was a miracle that the fire burned and the bush was not consumed, and when Aaron's rod budded without moisture. The bush and the rod signify the Virgin Mary, who with unspotted virginity and without pain brought forth the Son of God. Thus God renews signs and works new miracles. He glorifies his hand in preaching, and his right arm (the same Son by whom he made all things) in working miracles. As he himself said in John: *Glorify me, Father* [Jn 17.5]. He raises up indignation and pours out wrath upon the devil, in his Passion. He lifts up the adversary (human nature) in the Resurrection, and so crushes the enemy (the devil). The enemy is afflicted by nothing so much as by seeing his adversary raised up in glory. He hastens the time to come quickly to judgement, rendering to each what he deserves. Hasten the time to give your people peace! *The Lord will give us peace* [Is 26.12]. He remembers the end that he will give the wicked, according to their works. Let us say, then, *One of the seraphim flew to me*.

There follows: *And in his hand was a live coal*, which he had taken with the tongs off the altar. The word used means, strictly, a ‘chalk’: a little piece of stone mixed with earth, easily crushed on account of its smallness. Here it means ‘charcoal’. This ‘chalk’ is the humanity of Jesus Christ, which because of his humility was mixed with ‘earth’ (sinners), and crushed by the Jews; yet was a burning coal to us, purging our vices. He held this in his ‘hand’, the power of his divinity, having taken it with the tongs of a two-fold love from the altar of the glorious Virgin. Tongs are a smith’s tool, holding the heated metal in an iron grip. The tongs which smiths use resemble the forceps or tweezers used by tailors, doctors and barbers to grip threads or hairs.

Blessed Mary is indeed an altar. The word suggests ‘altitude’, which may mean distance upwards or downwards. An altar is an elevated structure on which sacrifice is offered. Blessed Mary was both ‘high’ in her sublime contemplation, and ‘low’ in her humility. She was an altar burning with the fire of divine love, offering herself to the Lord in an odour of sweetness [cf. Eph 5.2].

*And he touched my mouth*, etc. This is what is spoken of in today’s Gospel: *Spitting, he touched his tongue*. The seraph touched Isaiah’s mouth with the coal, and cleansed his sin. Jesus Christ touched the tongue of the dumb man with spittle, and he spoke. He touches the sinner’s mouth with the coal of his humanity, and his tongue with the saliva of his divinity, so that he may confess his sin, speak rightly, and be cleansed.

**(On the preacher: *Him that is liberal of his bread*.)**

13. There follows: *And looking up to heaven, he groaned and said to him: Ephpheta, which is, Be thou opened*. He taught us to groan, and to lift up our heart’s treasure to heaven, which by our sorrow is purged from the frivolous joys of the flesh. So it is said: *I roared with the groaning of my heart* [Ps 37.9]. *He said to him: Ephpheta*. *With the heart we believe unto justice; but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation* [Rom 10.10]. And at once his ears were opened to obey, and the band of his tongue was loosed to confess. Note what is said: *He spoke rightly*. He speaks rightly, who confesses his sin with all its circumstances, and with the intention of not sinning again.

He speaks rightly, too, who witnesses by works to what he preaches with his mouth. There is a **concordance** to this in Ecclesiasticus:

*The lips of many shall bless him that is liberal of his bread;*

*and the testimony of his truth is faithful*. [Ecclus 31.28]

He who faithfully dispenses the bread of God’s word, and does not hide the testimony of truth, will be blessed in this present life and in that which is to come. How many people there are today who are liberal in their words, but leprous in their deeds! In Exodus we read that Moses appeared ‘horned’ [cf. Ex 34.30]. Origen comments, "Why did only the face of Moses appear glorious, while his hand was leprous and his feet without glory?

Because he made him remove his shoes, when he called him from the bush." The same may be said of those preachers who make a splendid show in their preaching, but are unclean in their works. They are shoeless, not true husbands to the Church, and they deserve to be spat in the face, because they are unwilling to raise up children to their dead brother, Jesus Christ [cf. Dt 25.5-10]. Indeed, if there are children, they kill them by their bad example. The Psalm says:

*The floods have lifted up, O Lord: the floods have lifted up their voice*. [Ps 92.3]

They should first lift themselves up, and then their voice, so that it may be said: He spoke rightly.

**(On the testament and what it means.)**

14. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause:

*God also hath made us fit ministers of the new testament, not in the letter but in the spirit. For the letter killeth but the spirit quickeneth*. [2Cor 3.6]

See how the Epistle is **concordant** with the Gospel, and the Introit of the Mass with the Epistle. In the Gospel it says that the Lord put his fingers in the ears of the deaf man, and in the Epistle it says that the Law was written on stone by the finger of God. In the Introit we sing: *Have regard to thy covenant*; and we read in the Epistle: *Who hath made us fit ministers of the new testament*.

Let us say, then: *Who hath made us fit ministers of the new testament*. A minister is one of lesser station, who performs some manual duty. A testament takes effect only after the death of the testator: as the Apostle says: *A testament is of force after men are dead* [Heb 9.17]. Fit ministers of the new testament are those who first hear, with the five fingers of Jesus Christ in their ears; and then speak: ‘Come!’ Those who speak rightly look upon themselves as the least in the congregation of the faithful. They perform their duty with hand and with work, so as worthily to administer the word of the New Testament, and they are given force in the death of Jesus Christ.

The Introit speaks of this:

*Have regard, O Lord, for thy covenant:*

*and do not leave to the end the souls of thy poor.*

*Arise, O God, judge thine own cause,*

*and forget not the voices of them that seek thee*. [cf. Ps 73.20,19,23]

Lord Jesus Christ, have regard to your covenant, which you have confirmed to your children with your blood; lest you should die intestate. Give them to speak your word with confidence. Do not leave to the end the souls you have redeemed, the souls of your poor who have no inheritance apart from you. Uphold them, Lord, with the staff of your strength, because they are your poor. Lead them, do not desert them, lest without you they stray. Guide them to the end, so that finding their fulfilment in you, their end, they may attain to you, their end. *Arise, Lord*, who now seem to sleep, *overlooking the sins of men for the sake of repentance* [Wisd 11.24], *and judge your cause* (that is, distinguish from the wicked, like wheat from the chaff, the souls for whose sake you were led before Pontius Pilate). As the Psalm says:

*Thou hast maintained my judgement and my cause*. [Ps 9.5]

Do not forget the voices of them that seek you, for that is the meaning of the Gospel words, *He spoke rightly*. *He spoke* (that is the voice) *rightly* (of them that seek the Lord). God does not forget the voice of such a one; indeed, he stores him in the treasury of his glory, to receive an eternal reward.

We ask you, then, Lord Jesus, to open our ears with the fingers of your Incarnation, and to touch our tongue with the spittle of divine Wisdom, so that we may obey, praise and bless you, and attain to you who are blessed and glorious. Grant this, you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Let every faithful soul say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

1 OVID, *Remedium amoris*, 91

2 VERGIL, Eclogues III,13

3 cf. GREGORY, *Moralia* XXVI, 18,33; PL 76.368

4 cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Mt 3.6

5 cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Ex 34.30

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

[PROLOGUE FOR SEPTEMBER]

We give thanks to the seven-fold grace, by whose aid we have reached the first Sunday of the seventh month. Note, then, that on this and the following Sundays, the Book of Job is read in Church; and with God's help we will **concord** some texts from it with the clauses of this and next Sunday's Gospels.

## THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost: *Blessed are the eyes*, which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a theme for a sermon on the usefulness of preaching: *The stone that is in the dark*.)**

1. At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: *Blessed are the eyes that see the things which you see.* [Lk 10.23]

Job says:

*The stone also that is in the dark and the shadow of death the flood divideth from the people that are on their journey.* [Job 28.3-4]

Let us see what is meant by 'the stone that is in the dark', 'the shadow of death', 'the flood', and 'the people that are on their journey'.

The flood is preaching. Floods abound in winter, but dry up in summer; (hence the saying: 'Growth in the rain, withering in the drought'). So preaching abounds, and should abound, in the winter of our present, wretched life. The soul, cast out from God's face, should drink of this torrent in this way of exile [cf. Ps 109.7], and should hover over it like a dove, and look at itself. Job, however, curses the wretched soul, saying:

*Let him not see the streams of the river,*

*the brooks of honey and of butter*. [Job 20.17]

The stream is the water of compunction, that washes away the sinner's stains; the brook of honey is Sacred Scripture, which comforts and enlightens (just as honey enlightened the eyes of Jonathan [cf. 1Kg(Sm)14.27]); the brook of butter is the grace of devotion, which enriches the mind. Thus, the soul dedicated to the pleasures of the flesh will not see the streams of the river, because she does not weep for herself; nor the brooks of honey and butter, because she is not enlightened by the sweetness of preaching nor enriched by the grace of devotion. This brook will dry up in the summer, which is the blessedness of eternal life; and so Jeremiah says:

*And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour,*

*and every man his brother, saying: Know the Lord.*

*For all shall know me from the least of them even to the greatest.* [Jer 31.34]

In the meantime, Job shows how useful preaching is when he says*: The stone that is in the dark*... A stone may hurt your foot, and darkness is caused by the density of the air, mainly due to the heat of the air. The 'stone in the dark' is the devil's temptation, who lives in this darkened air and inflicts the darkness of fiery temptation upon the mind, to injure and pervert anyone affected by it.

A shadow is air that lacks sunlight. It arises when a solid body blocks the rays of the sun. Death is bitter; the shadow of death is the darkening of the mind, when some wretch lets riches block the true sun's light, like a solid obstacle. He is like someone who uses a sunshade to keep cool; but when he is under this shade he is deprived of the knowledge and remembrance of God. Temporal concerns cause forgetfulness of God, as Genesis tells:

*The chief butler, when things prospered with him, forgot his interpreter*. [Gen 40.23]

The flood of preaching divides 'the stone in the dark' (the devil's temptation) and 'the shadow of death' (the mind's forgetfulness) from the pilgrim people: penitents, the poor in spirit, followers of the apostles who reckon themselves to be poor pilgrims, exiles and guests in this exile. To them, the Lord says in today's Gospel: *Blessed are the eyes that see the things which you see.*

2. There are three points to note in this Gospel: first, the blessedness of those who see Christ, as it begins: *Blessed are the eyes*. Second, the love of God and neighbour, as it goes on: *A certain lawyer*. Third, the descent of the man from Jerusalem to Jericho, as it concludes: *A certain man went down from Jerusalem*.

The Introit of today's Mass is: *Look on us, God our protector*. The Epistle is taken from that of St. Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the three clauses of the Gospel. The first part is: *To Abraham were the*

*promises made*. The second: *Now this I say*. The third: *Now a mediator*, etc. The reason for reading this Epistle with this Gospel is that the sum of the two (the Epistle and the Gospel) is **concordant** with the Law given to Moses.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(On the Nativity and the Passion of the Lord: *Happy shall I be*; and: *I have sewed sack-cloth upon my skin*.)**

3. Let us say, then:

*Blessed are the eyes that see the things you see. For I say to you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see the things that you see, and have not seen them; and to hear the things that you hear, and have not heard them*. [Lk 10.23-24]

Even so Tobias said:

*Happy shall I be if there remain of my seed, to see the glory of Jerusalem*, [Tob 13.20]

that is to say, to see the humanity of Jesus Christ. The remnant of the seed of Tobias is the apostles, the seed which the Lord has blessed [cf. Is 61.9], of whom Isaiah says:

*That which shall stand therein shall be a holy seed*. [Is 6.13]

They were the seed of Tobias in virtue of their faith and patience, and so they merited to see the glory of Jerusalem. That is why they are told, Blessed are the eyes that see the things which you see. They saw a man, but they believed in God. Blessed are the eyes of the clean of heart, who see Jesus Christ! As Job said, *Now my eye seeth thee* [Job 42.5]. Blessed are the eyes not blinded by the dung of riches, nor clouded by the inflammation of care, for they shall see the Son of God, wrapped in swaddling bands, lying in the manger, fleeing into Egypt, riding on a donkey, stripped, and hanging on the Cross. That is what the apostles saw. That is what diseased eyes cannot see. As the Psalm says:

*Fire hath fallen upon them, and they shall not see the sun*. [Ps 57.9]

Inflamed eyes cannot look at the sun.

4. The sun is Christ, who, that he might be looked on, covered himself with cloud. He himself says, in Job:

*I have sewed sack-cloth upon my skin,*

*and have covered my face with ashes.*

*My face is swollen with weeping;*

*and my eyelids are dim.*

*These things I have suffered*

*without the iniquity of my hand,*

*when I offered pure prayers to God.*

*O earth, cover not thou my blood:*

*neither let my cry find a hiding place in thee*. [Job 16.16-19]

Sackcloth and ashes stand for the roughness and lowliness of human nature. Jesus Christ made a tunic for himself from the sackcloth of our nature, sewing it with the needle of the Holy Spirit's subtle operation, and the thread of the blessed Virgin's faith; and he put it on and sprinkled it with the ashes of lowliness and poverty. Diseased and accursed eyes cannot see this. Alas! The face of Jesus Christ was swollen with blows and tears. He bore them without iniquity in his hand, *having done no iniquity, nor was there deceit in his mouth* [Is 53.9]. He offered pure prayers to his Father for the impure and the defiled. As Isaiah says, *He prayed for the transgressors* [Is 53.12], saying, *Father, forgive them*.. [Lk 23.34]. O earth (that is, O sinner), do not cover my blood with the love of earthly things. It was the price of your redemption. I beg you, let it make you fruitful. I have written TAU on your forehead in my own blood, lest the destroying angel destroy you [cf. Ezek 9.4-5]. I beg you, do not cover it with earth. Do not erase the writing of the inscription that Pilate would not change. He confirmed it, saying, *What I have written, I have written* [Jn 19.22].

*Neither let my cry find a hiding place in thee*. The cry of our Redeemer is the Blood of redemption, which (as the Apostle says to the Hebrews) *speaketh better than the blood of Abel* [Heb 12.24]. The blood of Abel sought the death of the fratricide, but the blood of the Lord intercedes for the life of his persecutors. His cry finds a hiding place in us, if our tongue is silent about what our mind believes. The blinded eyes do not see this sack-cloth or these ashes. The deaf ears do not hear this cry. So the Lord adds: *I say to you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see...*

The prophets stand for the prelates of the Church, kings for the powerful of the world. Both would like to see Christ in heaven, but they are unwilling to behold him hanging on the Cross. They want both to reign with Christ and to rejoice with the world. They say with Balaam*: Let my soul die the death of the just* [Num 23.10]. They want to behold the glory of the divinity, which the Apostles saw, but not to bear the shame of the Passion or the poverty of Jesus Christ, which his disciples bore; and so they will not see him with

the Apostles, they will gaze with the wicked on him they have pierced [cf. Jn 19.37]. They will not hear the gentle whisper, *Come, ye blessed of my Father*; only the thunder: *Depart, ye cursed.*

5. Regarding this, Job says:

*Who shall be able to behold the thunder of his greatness?* [Job 26.14]

and:

*Thou didst hold the exttremities of the earth, shaking them;*

*and thou hast shaken the ungodly out of it.* [cf. Job 36.13]

The Lord held the extremities of the earth when he chose the weak and contemptible things of the world to confound the strong [cf. 1Cor 1.27-28]. A father holds his son with one hand, while he chastises him with the other. He holds him, lest he should fall headlong; but he chastises him, lest he grow proud and insolent. In this way the Lord holds the just man with the hand of mercy, lest he fall into sin; but he chastises him, lest he raise himself above the Father's grace- as the Apostle says*: Lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me*... [2Cor 12.7].

Then follows: *And thou hast shaken the ungodly out of it*. In the day of judgement, the Lord will shake the wicked out of our earth, in which they have sinned, into hell: as one might shake the dust out of a bag. The earth itself, irritated by the weight of their sins, will shake the wicked into hell, wherein *there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth* [cf. Mt 8.12] for those who wander in vanity and pillage the goods of the poor. The eyes of such will not see Jesus in heaven, but a multitude of demons in hell. They will not hear the song of the angels, but only the gnashing of teeth.

6. To this clause, the Introit of today's Mass is **concordant**:

*Behold, O God our protector: and look upon the face of thy Christ.*

*For better is one day in thy courts above thousands*. [Ps 83.10-11]

Blessed are the eyes which will see, in bitterness of heart, the face of Jesus Christ, swollen with blows and smeared with spittle; for they will see that *on which the angels long to gaze* [cf. 1Pt 1.12], glorious in the courts of the heavenly Jerusalem. Job says: *He shall see his face with joy* [Job 33.26], as if to say, if a man will first see here, in bitterness of heart, the face of Jesus Christ as it was in his Passion; then later he will see it in joyfulness of mind such as can neither be expressed nor restrained, as it is in eternal blessedness. The brightness of this countenance is the 'one day' which lightens the city of Jerusalem without interruption, and which exceeds every other brightness. It is this we

pray the Father that we may be found fit to attain, saying: *Behold, O God our protector*. If God's protection were always to hand, we would believe less that we needed it; it is useful if it is sometimes withdrawn, that a man may be shown that he is nothing without it. *Behold, O God our protector: and look upon the face of thy Christ*. Do not look upon our sins, Father, but look upon the face of thy Christ, which because of our sins was swollen with blows and tears, and smeared with spittle, to reconcile us sinners to you. So that you may spare us, he shows you his face bruised with blows, that you may look upon it, and, as you look, have mercy on us who were the cause of his Passion.

**(A theme for the Nativity of the Lord on: *If there shall be an angel for him*; and: *Like a grain of mustard-seed*.)**

7. There is a **concordance** to this in Job:

*If there shall be an angel speaking for him,*

*one among thousands, to declare man's uprightness,*

*he shall have mercy on him, and shall say:*

*Deliver him, that he may not go down to corruption.*

*I have found wherein I may be merciful to him.*

*His flesh is consumed with punishments:*

*let him return to the days of his youth.* [Job 33.23-25]

This angel means Christ. He speaks for us to the Father, as one like us. While he surpasses us in all his operations by his immense power, in one thing at least he is not unlike us: in the reality of his form. He who speaks for us to the Father by the nature which shows his likeness to us, speaks to the Father by the very thing that constitutes that likeness. His speaking is itself 'showing himself as a man for us', a man to whom no equal is to be found, a man who, being without sin, intercedes for sinners.

*He shall have mercy on him, and shall say...* Being a mediator, he has pity on man, because he took human form. He says*: Deliver him, that he may not go down to corruption*. His 'saying' consists in freeing man by taking human nature to show it as free. Indeed, by the very flesh he took, he shows that what he redeemed is free.

*I have found wherein I may be merciful to him*; as if to say clearly, because there was not a single man who might appear before God as a righteous intercessor for mercy, I made myself man, to intercede for men. And while showing myself as man, I found in man that whereby I might be merciful to man.

*His flesh is consumed with punishments*. The human race was oppressed with innumerable punishments for its vices and guilt, but when the Redeemer came it returned to the days of its youth; that is, it was renewed in the integrity of its former life, that the cause of its fall might not remain in it, but, being redeemed, it might return to what it was created to attain.

8. To this first clause the first part of today's Epistle is **concordant**:

*To Abraham were the promises made and to his seed. He saith not, And to his seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ*. [Gal 3.16]

He was like the grain of mustard seed, planted in the garden of the blessed Virgin. By his poverty and humility, he was the smallest of all seeds (that is, of all men) in his Nativity; he grew in his preaching and miracles, wherein he was greater than all herbs (the fathers of the Old Testament); he became a tree in his Resurrection, and spread his branches in the preaching of the Apostles; so that the birds of the air (the Church's faithful) come by faith, and live by hope and charity, in its branches- his teaching and example [cf. Mt 13.31-32]

Therefore, blessed are those who see him now by faith, in whom all the nations are blessed, for they shall see him hereafter face to face in heavenly glory, and shall hear*: Come, you blessed of my Father*. May the blessed Christ himself vouchsafe to bring us to that vision, and to the sound of that voice; he who is God, blessed for ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A theme for a sermon on the love of God, and on the position of the human heart, on: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.)***

9. There follows, secondly:

*And behold a certain lawyer stood up, tempting him, and saying, Master, what must I do to possess eternal life? But he said to him, What is written in the law? How readest thou? He answering said: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said to him: Thou hast answered rightly; this do, and thou shalt live*. [Lk 10.25-28]

This text includes every perfection, of this life and the next. Each and every word is of great power and utility, and we will treat briefly of them all.

Love binds together, and so implies two terms. Love is based on two precepts, the love of God and of neighbour, and is to be found only in the good. Love binds two together. The Lord is master of all creation, head of all the cosmic household, the judge of all. God

(in Hebrew: *El*) is the Awesome, the One who sees all. The Greek *theos* is related to the word for 'run', for he runs through all things. Love binds us to God and to our neighbour. It is the 'line' that the Lord speaks of in Job:

*Who hath stretched the line upon it?*

*Upon what are its bases grounded?* [Job 38.5-6]

The Lord has stretched the line of his love upon the soul, so that it may in turn stretch itself out to love of neighbour. On what, other than Jesus Christ, are its 'bases' (the pure intentions of the soul, upon which the whole fabric of virtues rests) grounded? If ever the intention is not firmly grounded upon Christ, the whole structure collapses, and great is the fall thereof [cf. Mt 7.27]. Therefore, *Love the Lord thy God*.

Note these two terms, 'Lord' and 'God'. He is Lord, as master of all creation; he is God, who sees all things and runs through all things. So Sophar the Naamathite says of him:

*He is higher than heaven, and what wilt thou do?*

*He is deeper than hell, and how wilt thou know?*

*The measure of him is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.*

*If he shall overturn all things, or shall press them together,*

*who shall contradict him? ...*

*Or, who can say: Why dost thou so?* [Job 11.8-10; 9.12]

'Heaven' means the angels; 'hell', the demons; 'earth', just men; 'the sea', sinners. The angels cannot scale his height; he judges the wiles of the demons, being far subtler than they think; his patience surpasses the long-suffering of the just; and he is present everywhere, even in the deeds of sinners.

Also: man is 'heaven' by contemplation; 'hell' by the darkness of temptation; 'earth' when he bears fruit; and 'sea' when he is troubled and changeable. But man's contemplation falls short of God, and when he struggles with temptation he fears God's keener judgements. In the end, his reward exceeds his works. However much his mind tosses as it seeks, it cannot fathom what the future holds. Again: God's 'breadth' is measured by his love; his 'length' by his forbearance; his 'height' in surpassing our intellectual desires; and his 'depth' in judging the unlawful movements of the flesh. He overturns heaven when he destroys man's contemplation; hell, when he allows the timid in temptation to fall into worse things; earth, when he uproots the fruit of good works by adversity; and the sea, when he confounds our stumbling with the terror of judgement.

He presses heaven and hell together, when contemplation uplifts, and temptation blinds the very same mind. He presses earth and sea together, when in the same mind there is a sure faith in what is eternal to strengthen it, and a wind of doubt to blow on it with indecision. Because he is like this, and so great, he is to be loved: therefore, *Love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart*.

It says, 'thy' God: and so he is to be loved all the more. We love what is ours more than what is someone else's. He deserves your love, who, being your Lord and God, made himself your servant; so that you might be his, and might not be ashamed to serve him. As Isaiah says:

*Thou hast made me to serve with my sins.* [Is 43.24]

For thirty-three years your God was made your slave becuse of your sins, so that he might free you from slavery to the devil. Therefore, you shall love the Lord your God who made you, who subjected himself for your sake, who gave himself wholly to you, that you might give yourself wholly to him. Love the Lord your God, then. In his first work, when you were not, he gave himself to you; in his second work, when you were faring ill, he gave himself to you that you might be well; and when he gave himself to you, he gave you back to yourself. Given and restored, you owe him yourself; you owe him double; and you owe him totally. Therefore, love the Lord your God with all your heart. When he says 'all', he does not exempt some part of you; he commands you to offer your whole self to him. 'By his whole self, he redeemed your whole self', that he alone might possess you wholly. Therefore, love the Lord your God with all your heart. Do not withhold part of yourself, like Ananias and Saphira, lest you perish wholly with them [cf. Acts 5.1-10]. Love wholly, not in part. God has no parts, he is everywhere wholly, and so he does not want just some part in what is yours, being wholly in what is his. If you keep back some part of you for yourself, you are yours and not his. Do you want to have him wholly? Then give him what is yours, and he will give you what is his. Then you will have nothing of your own, because you will have all of him with all of yourself. Therefore, *love the Lord your God.*

**(On the Passion: *A bundle of myrrh*.)**

10. Take note of these four things: heart, soul, strength and mind. The heart is situated in the middle of the human chest, a little to the left hand side, just off the dividing line between the breasts. It inclines towards the left breast, in the upper part of the chest. It is not large, nor elongated in shape, but it is more or less round, and somewhat narrow and pointed at the end. O man, the very position and shape of your heart tells you how you should love the Lord your God. Your heart is in the middle of your chest, between your two breasts. These two breasts offer a double reminder: of the Lord's Incarnation, and of his Passion, from which the soul is nourished as by two breasts. The right breast is the reminder of his Incarnation, the left of his Passion. Your heart should be set between these two breasts, so that whatever you think and whatever you do aright, you should refer wholly to the poverty and humility of the Incarnation, and to the bitterness of the Lord's Passion. Thus the Bride says in Canticles:

*A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me;*

*he shall abide between my breasts.* [Cant 1.12]

The soul, the Bride of Jesus Christ, beloved Son of God the Father, makes for herself a bundle of myrrh from the whole life of her beloved. She remembers how he was laid in the manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes and driven into Egypt, a poor and homeless exile; how frequently he was hurt by the injuries and blasphemies of the Jews; how he was betrayed by his disciple, bound by the guards and led before Annas and Caiphas, tied to a pillar and flogged by Pontius Pilate, crowned with thorns, struck with blows and smeared with spittle, and crucified between thieves and murderers. From all these things, gathered into one and firmly tied with the band of devotion, she makes for herself a bundle of myrrh, that is, of bitterness and sorrow, and she puts it between her breasts, where the heart is situated. Such a bundle of myrrh should always be upon the Bride's heart.

And note that just as the heart inclines somewhat towards the left breast, so compassion and devotion of heart should incline towards the bitterness of the Lord's Passion. Thus, Magdalene first poured tears and ointment upon the Lord's feet, which denote his Passion. Whoever suffers with the Lord in his suffering, weeps over his feet; and whoever gives thanks for the benefit of his Passion, anoints them. We owe both, sorrow and devotion, to the Passion of Jesus Christ. And as your heart is in the upper part of your chest, so its thoughts and will should be set upon the glory above*. Where your treasure is*- Jesus Christ, the manna in the gold vessel- *there your heart should be too* [cf. Mt 6.21]. And as your heart is not large, nor elongated in shape, but tends rather to roundness: so you too should not swell up with pride, or stretch out by desire, but live a rounded and perfect life. A round object suffers no diminution. And as the end of your heart is narrow and comes to a point, so you should always recollect how the end of your life will be narrow and sharp. Narrow, because you needs must pass through the very narrow gate of death, through which you will not be able to carry anything with you save your sins, which are worthless; sharp, because fear of the Judge will pierce you, and horror of punishment will sting you. Therefore, while you have your heart in your own power, *love the Lord your God with all your heart*.

**(On the soul and its powers: *With all your soul*)**

11. And with all your soul. The soul is an incorporeal substance, intellectual, rational, invisible, of unknown origin, and with nothing of earth mixed in it. The etymology may refer to that which is the principle of its own movement (*anemos*), and the cause of motion in bodies; or from 'recollection' (*ana-mneia*); or from that which gives (*an-iemi*) life to a body, as a kind of superior 'life-blood' (*ana-ema*). Therefore, love the Lord your God with all your soul, that all your movement, thought and life may be related to love of him.

**(Against carnal folk: *Sweet to the gravel*.)**

And with all your strength. The soul has three powers: the rational, the concupiscible and the irascible. By the rational power we distinguish good from bad; by the concupiscible we desire the good, and by the irascible we detest the bad. Weak people who have lost these powers are like those of whom Job says:

*He hath been sweet to the gravel of Cocytus,*

*and he shall draw every man after him.* [Job 21.33]

By 'gravel' we understand the small stones in rivers, which the current drags along with it. Cocytus, in mythology, was supposed to be formed from the tears of women and weaklings. The philosophers say that the river Cocytus flows in hell, meaning that the tears of the wicked flow there. The love of transitory things is 'sweet to the gravel of Cocytus', to those who will not stand firm against false pleasures, and who by their daily falls are drawn towards eternal sorrow. The delight of earthly love draws 'every man', meaning 'the whole man', rational, concupiscible and irascible. Worldly prudence draws the rational power, pleasure of the flesh draws the concupiscible, and vainglory the irascible.

**(On the four friends of Job and their meaning: *Eliphaz*.)**

12. These are the three friends of Job: Eliphaz the Themanite, Baldad the Suhite and Sophar the Naamathite [cf. Job 2.11: note that, despite the 'theme', Eliu is not mentioned by Antony]

'Eliphaz' means 'contempt of the Lord', and 'Themanite' means 'of the south wind'. He represents worldly prudence, which proceeds from the hot south wind of worldly desire- for the children of this world are wiser in their generation, etc. [cf. Lk 16.8]. It despises the wisdom of the Lord, and so is despised by it; whence Isaiah says:

*When being wearied thou shalt cease to despise, thou shalt be despised.* [Is 33.1]

'Baldad' means 'antiquity alone', and 'Suhite' means 'speaking'. He represents the pleasure of the flesh which began from our first parents, and which by succeeding generations makes old the skin of the children. The old Adam passed on this inheritance to us; this ageing arose from the serpent's words. So in the psalm the penitent says:

*Through the voice of my groaning my bone hath cleaved to my flesh*, [Ps 101.6]

that is, from the temptations of pleasure, which are the cause of my groaning, my reason and virtue cleave to my carnality.

‘Sophar’ means ‘the scattering of the look-out’, and ‘Naamathite’ means ‘beauty’- the vainglory which arise from the false appearance of religion, and scatters the look-out of contemplation and every good work: *They have received their reward*. [Mt 6.5]

By these three, the three virtues of the soul are destroyed; and so it is necessary for blessed Job (‘mourning’), the penitent who mourns in order to be free of grief, not to listen to or heed these three friends (of whom he himself says, *My friends are full of words* [Job 16.21]), so that he may love the Lord his God with all his strength.

13. *And with all your mind*. ‘The mind is that part of the soul by which all reason and understanding is perceived.’ It is called ‘mind’, because it is eminent in the soul, and because it is mindful. The mind is not the soul as such, but the higher part, from which understanding proceeds. Whence it is because of his mind that man is called the image of God. But all these things are so joined in the soul that it is a single entity. The soul is allotted various names, according to the effects it produces. As it animates the body, it is ‘life’; as it chooses, it is ‘the will’; as it thinks, it is ‘the mind’; as it judges what is right, it is ‘the reason’; as it breathes, it is ‘the spirit’; when it senses, it is ‘feeling’. Therefore: *Love the Lord your God with all your mind*, so that whatever you think, know or understand, you refer to the love of God.

There follows: *And thy neighbour as thyself*. (Regarding this, see the first part of the Gospel: *There was a certain rich man who was clad in purple and fine linen* [Pentecost I]). There is a **concordance** to this in Job, where he says:

*Visiting thy species thou shalt not sin*, [Job 5.24]

regarding which, see the second clause of the first sermon: *In the beginning God created heaven and earth* [Septuagesima].

14. To this second clause, the second part of the Epistle is **concordant**:

*This I say, that the testament which was confirmed by God...* [Gal 3.17]

A testament is a will, written, witnessed and confirmed. God’s will is love of him and of our neighbour, written in the law of nature and confirmed by the witness of Scripture and grace, whereby he said;

*This is my commandment, that you love one another*. [Jn 15.12]

This testament came into force on the death of the testator; so John says:

*Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end*, [Jn 13.1]

that is, to death: not because his love was ended by death, but because he loved so

much that his love led him even to death.

We ask you then, Lord Jesus, to bind us with love of you and of our neighbour, whereby we may love you with all our heart (that is, strongly, so that we may not be drawn away), with all our soul (that is, wisely, lest we be deceived), with all our strength and with all our mind (that is, steadily, lest we be tempted and diverted from your love); and our neighbour as ourselves. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

**(A moral sermon on the life of the prelate or preacher: *The lamp shined*.)**

15. *Do this, and thou shalt live*. Job says:

*The lamp of God shined over my head ...*

*I washed my feet in butter:*

*and the rock poured me out rivers of oil*. [cf. Job 29.3,6]

The lamp denotes preaching, the head is the mind; the butter is compunction leading to tears, the feet are the affections of the heart; the rock is Christ, and the oil is the grace of the Holy Spirit. So, when the light of preaching shines on the mind of a sinner, he washes the stains from his feet (the affections of his heart) with the butter of compunction flowing from the richness of his love. Thus the rock of Jesus Christ pours out upon him rivers of oil, the abundant grace of the Holy Spirit, whereby he is enlightened here and now, and will live in glory in the world to come. Whence the Lord says: *This do, and thou shalt live*.

**(On the life of the just man: *There was a man in the land of Hus, named Job*.)**

Take note of the three words, 'this', 'do' and 'live'. They refer to teaching, life and glory. 'This' is the teaching, 'do' is your life, and 'live' is glory. O man, what you hear in preaching, put into practice in your life. When the lamp shines on your head, wash your feet with butter; and so you will live, because the rock will pour rivers of oil upon you, the very thing you hear: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God* [*with all thy heart, soul, strength and mind*]. These four are **concordant** to the four qualities ascribed to Job at the beginning of the book:

*There was a man in the land of Hus, whose name was Job: and that man was simple, and upright, and fearing God, and avoiding evil*. [Job 1.1]

The 'Land of Hus' is counsel. Therein lives the just man who keeps the counsels and commandments of the Lord. He is simple in the purity of his heart, upright in the affection of his soul, God-fearing in the ordered expression of his natural strength, and he avoids evil with firmness of mind.

**(Against those who seek human praise: *If I beheld the sun*.)**

Do this, and you will be simple, without deviousness or deceit, seeking God's praise, not your own, and saying with Job:

*If I beheld the sun when it shined,*

*and the moon going in brightness:*

*and my heart in secret hath rejoiced,*

*and I have kissed my hand with my mouth:*

*(which is a very great iniquity,*

*and a denial against the most high God).* [Job 31.26-28]

'The sun when it shines' means good deeds being shown off. 'The moon in brightness' is reputation, which as it shines in the night of this life derives its strength from good deeds. 'The heart rejoicing in secret' refers to those who are puffed up with self-praise, and rejoice over themselves. 'Kissing the hand with the mouth' is to praise one's own work (hand) with the speech of one's mouth. That is 'a great iniquity and a denial against God', because whoever takes credit to himself for the good he does is convicted of denying the grace of his maker. Do this, then, in such wise as you do not gaze on the sun of your good works or the moon of your reputation, and take pride in them. Do not praise yourself, but give all the credit to your Creator.

**(A theme for a sermon for penitents: *If thou wilt arise early*.)**

16. *Do this*, also, that you may be upright; as Bildad the Suhite says:

*If thou wilt arise early to God,*

*and wilt beseech the Almighty:*

*If thou wilt walk clean and upright:*

*he will presently awake unto thee,*

*and will make the dwelling of thy justice peaceable.*

*In so much, that if thy former things were small,*

*thy latter things would be multiplied exceedingly.* [Job 8.5-7]

If you arise, in mind and heart together, early in contrition of heart, to God; and beseech the Almighty by confessing your sin and his praise; and walk clean and upright in penitential satisfaction: he will awake to you in the morning of contrition, and make the dwelling of your justice peaceable in the confession of your sin. He who, by justly accusing himself, judges himself in confession, will possess his bodily dwelling in peace, with a tranquil mind. In so much, that *if thy former things were small*: that is, penance here and now increases grace, and heaps up glory hereafter. *Do this*, then, *and you will live*.

*Do this*, too, that you may be God-fearing, so as to say with Job:

*I have always feared God as waves swelling over me;*

*and his weight I was not able to bear.* [Job 31.23]

When the waves crash down, sailors take no heed of temporal concerns, nor does carnal pleasure occupy their minds! They even cast overboard the very things for which they had taken large vessels. The God-fearing man, when he is, as it were, tossed about by the waves, desires true life and despises all the things he carries as earthly possessions. Alternatively, the tossing waves may be understood as the final cataclysm, when all the elements are shaken, and the heavenly Judge comes to bring about the end of all: as the saints dread daily. His weight I was not able to bear, because if you consider the final judgement with an attentive mind, you will see that the impending terror is so great that you will be afraid even to think about it, let alone see it! *Do this*, then, *and you will live*.

17. *Do this*, too, that you may avoid evil. Sophar the Naamathite says:

*If thou wilt put away from thee the iniquity that is in thy hand,*

*and let not injustice remain in thy tabernacle:*

*then mayest thou lift up thy face without spot;*

*and thou shalt be steadfast and shalt not fear.*

*Thou shalt also forget misery,*

*and remember it only as waters that are passed away.*

*And brightness, like that of the noonday, shall arise to thee at evening;*

*and when thou shalt think thyself consumed,*

*thou shalt rise as the day-star.*

*And thou shalt have confidence, hope being set before thee:*

*and being buried thou shalt sleep secure.*

*Thou shalt rest, and there shall be none to make thee afraid.* [Job 11.14-19]

St Gregory[1] says: "Iniquity in the hand is sinful action; injustice in the tabernacle is wickedness in the mind. The mind is called a tabernacle, in which we are hidden within ourselves, when we are not seen outwardly in action. To lift up the face is to raise up the mind to God by the practice of prayer; a spot disfigures that face when conscience accuses him of his sin. *Thou shalt be steadfast and not fear*, for the more one is firmly established in good deeds, the less one fears judgement. *Thou shalt forget misery*, for the more the mind neglects the good that is to come, the harder it feels the evils of this present life; but if it fixes the heart's eye on the things that last, it recks nothing of whatever leads to its goal. Brightness like the noon-day: the noon-day brightness in the evening is the renewal of virtue in temptation."

*And when thou shalt think thyself consumed*. Often, so many temptations beset us that we are inclined almost to fall into despair; but our Maker looks upon our darkness, and restores the rays of lost light. Then you will have confidence, with the hope of divine mercy set before you.

*And being buried thou shalt sleep secure*. They sleep secure, being buried, who enter watchfully into their inmost parts, and hide themselves from the laborious burdens of this world under the stillness of rest: *Thou shalt rest, and none shall make thee afraid*. Whoever has an unshakeable desire for eternity will desire nothing in the world, and so will fear nothing of the world.

Do this, then, and you will live; with the life of grace now, and the life of glory hereafter. May he who is life and glory lead you to it, he who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A theme on the fall of our first parent, and the mercy of the Redeemer: *A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho*.)**

18. There follows, thirdly:

*A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers*, etc. [Lk

10.30]

This man is Adam, man in general, who when he tried to raise himself up, fell by deceit, and went down from the blessedness of the heavenly Jerusalem to the miseries and weakness of this changeful and error-ridden life. By this, he fell among robbers, fell into the power of the angels of night, who make themselves appear as angels of light, but cannot do so for long. He would not have fallen among them, if he had not rendered himself liable by straying from the heavenly command. They strip him of the garments of spiritual grace, immortality and innocence, and inflict on him the wounds of sin, whereby the integrity of human nature is violated, and death pierces the entrails. One who keeps unspotted the garments he has assumed, cannot feel the blows of the robbers. They went away, not by ceasing to ambush, but by hiding their ambush. Leaving him half dead, because though they could deprive him of immortality, they could not take away his ability to reason, without which man cannot know and recognise God. The priest and the Levite who pass by are the priesthood and ministry of the old Law or Testament, which can expose the wounds of the fallen world, but cannot cure them.

The Samaritan ('guardian') is the Lord, who for our sakes was made man, undertook the journey of this life, and came to the wounded man,

*being made in the likeness of man, and in habit found as a man*, [Phil 2.7]

our kinsman by taking on our suffering, and our neighbour by bestowing his mercy. He bound up his wounds, checking sin by rebuking it. He poured in oil, giving hope to penitents by saying:

*Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* [Mt 4.17]

He poured in wine, inspiring sinners with the fear of punishment by saying:

*Every tree that doth not yield good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire*. [Mt 3.10]

His beast is his own flesh, in which he came to us, on which he placed the wounded man, bearing our sins in his body [cf. 1Pt 2.24]. He is carried, who believes in the Incarnation and believes that he is saved by the mysteries from the assault of the Enemy.

The inn is the Church here on earth, where wayfarers and those returning to the eternal homeland are refreshed. He is taken to the inn, laid on the beast, because no-one enters the Church unless he is baptized and united with Christ's Body.

*He took care*, lest the sick man should lose the precepts he had received. But the Samaritan had not time to stay long on earth; he had to return whence he had come down. So next day, after his Resurrection, when a fuller brightness of eternal light than that before his Passion shone on the world, he took out two pence, the two Testaments

on which the name and image of the eternal King are inscribed, and gave to the host, the Apostles:

*Then he opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures*, [Lk 24.45]

so that they might guide the people. *And whatsoever thou shalt spend over and above*: the Apostle spends more when he says:

*Concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord; but I give counsel*. [1Cor 7.25]

He spends more, when he does not avail himself of the right to receive his upkeep [cf. 2Thess 3.9]. When he returns in judgement, he will repay, saying:

*Because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*. [Mt 25.21]

*Which of these three?* It is clear from the text that the foreigner who expended mercy on him was closer to the Jerusalemite than were the priest and Levite of his own people. No-one is closer than one who has cured our wounds, because the head is one with the limbs. Let us love him, then, as Lord and God, and let us love him as our neighbour. Let us also love whoever is an imitator of Christ. Whence there follows: *Do likewise*. To show that you truly love your neighbour as yourself, devoutly do whatever you can to relieve his bodily and spiritual needs.

19. To this third clause, the third part of the Epistle is **concordant**:

*Now a mediator is not of one: but God is one. Was the Law then against the promises of God? God forbid. For if there had been a law given which could give life, verily justice should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise, by the faith of Jesus Christ, might be given to them that believe*. [Gal 3.20-22]

Here it is clearly shown that neither the priest nor the Levite (the sacrifice and ministry of the old Law) could give life to, and justify, the human race. Only our mediator and Samaritan Jesus Christ cured the wounded, gave life to the half-dead, and laying him upon himself bore him to the inn of the Church, that the promise of eternal life might be given to him who believes in Jesus Christ. Justice does not come from the priest or the Levite, but from faith in Jesus Christ. *Scripture hath concluded all under sin*. This is what the same Apostle says to the Romans:

*God hath concluded all in unbelief, that he may have mercy on all*, [Rom 11.32]

as if to say, when their sins have been noted by the law, they are convicted and cannot excuse themselves. They must seek the mercy of our Samaritan mediator.

There is a **concordance** to this in Job:

*There is none that may be able to reprove both,*

*and to put his hand between both.* [Job 9.33]

If two enemies, with swords in their hands, fight each other: who would be willing to place himself between them and restrain them, except one who has kinship with them both? God and man fought each other, God with the sword of punishment and man with the sword of sin. No-one could prevent this strife. Christ came, kin to both parties, being Son both of God and of man, and placed himself between them to restrain them. He charged man not to sin, and by suffering stood in the way of God the Father, lest he strike. He took the hand of both, showing man an example of how to act, and showing God his own actions, to placate him.

Beloved brothers, let us together pray him to heal the wounds of our sins, and to reconcile us to himself; that we may return from this Jericho to the heavenly Jerusalem from which we have fallen: by his help, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

**(A moral sermon on the seven sons of Job, which are the seven beatitudes: *A certain man*.)**

20. *A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves*, etc. [Lk 10.30]

The Lord says to Job:

*Tell me, if thou knowest, where is the way where light dwelleth;*

*and where is the place of darkness?* [Job 38.18-19]

Light and darkness represent justice and wickedness. Light dwells in Jerusalem, Jericho is the place of darkness; so whoever goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho is going down from the light of justice to the darkness of iniquity. So: A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, etc. Let us see what is the moral significance of the man, Jerusalem, Jericho, the robbers, the priest, the Levite, the Samaritan, the oil and wine, the beast, the inn, the innkeeper and the two pence. With all these, we will find **concordances** in the Book of Job, as the Lord may grant us.

This man is any just man, who as long as he is occupied in works of penance, and is suspended in the sweetness of contemplation (saying with Job: *My soul chooseth hanging* [Job 7.15]), surely dwells in Jerusalem. He is a true Job, a man simple and upright, and fearing God, and avoiding evil; *having seven sons and three daughters* [cf. Job 1.1-2].

The seven sons of the just man are those seven beatitudes of which the Lord speaks in Matthew [Mt 5.3ff]. *Blessed are the poor in spirit*. This beatitude has two parts: the abdication of possessions and contrition of spirit, so that even a good man thinks himself useless and inferior to others. The poor in spirit do not exalt themselves on high, but cultivate those things that pertain to fear and true humility. As Job says:

*I change my face, and am tormented with sorrow.*

*I feared all my works, knowing that thou didst not spare the offender*. [Job 9.27-28]

He changes his face when he does not give his mind to exalted things; and so he is tormented with sorrow for what he has done. The man poor in spirit fears his works, fearing idleness and delusion. Idleness lessens the love of God; delusion lessens a proper self-love, when someone who has done a good deed wants secret gratification in his heart, or an aura of approval or reward outwardly. But *blessed is the man who shakes his hands from all reward* [Is 33.15]. Reward from the mouth is glorying in praise; reward from the heart is expecting to be well thought of; reward from the hand is a bribe that is given. One should be afraid of these, strengthened by knowing that God will not spare an offender. Even though he calls sinners to repentance, he does not leave any sin without its retribution. Either man punishes it, or God.

*Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land*. The meek man is one who is not affected by a harsh or bitter mind; a simple faith teaches him to bear ever injury patiently. The meek man is dumb, not responding when he suffers injury. So Job says:

*If I have been afraid at a very great multitude,*

*and the contempt of kinsmen hath terrified me:*

*and I have not rather held my peace,*

*and not gone out of the door.* [Job 31.34]

As if to say: though everything rages against me outwardly, within myself I remain undisturbed. *The contempt of kinsmen hath terrified me*. There are people who are afraid of contempt. They are forced to ‘go out of the door’, since when they are knocked upon by insults, they open up things that were not known about them, as if going out through the door of their mouth. St Gregory[2] says: "To desire nothing in the world is a great safeguard, like hanging on to something immovable, and however much one is shaken in one’s lower nature, one is not shaken in mind; and if one is shaken outwardly, this is only the weakness of the flesh." He who has no fear of contempt, does not rush forth with his tongue. St Augustine[3] says: "If the people you live among do not praise your right living, that is their mistake- but if they do praise it, that is your danger!"

*Blessed are they that mourn*. Job says: *My face is swollen with weeping; and my eyelids are dim* [Job 16.17]; and again: *I went mourning* [Job 30.28]. St Gregory[4] says: "The holy man, though lifted up by wealth and honour, goes mourning because even though power and glory show him set over men, he offers God the sacrifice of a broken heart inwardly by his sorrow."

*Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice*. Job says:

*I was clad with justice: and I clothed myself with my judgement,*

*as with a robe and a diadem*. [Job 29.14]

He is clad with justice as with a robe, when he clothes and covers himself on every side with good deeds, and leaves no part of his behaviour naked to sin. The judgement of the just is called a diadem, because by it they aspire to be rewarded on high, not with earthly things here below.

*Blessed are the merciful*. Job says:

*If I have denied to the poor what they desired,*

*and have made the eyes of the widow wait:*

*If I have eaten my morsel alone,*

*and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof:*

*(for from my infancy mercy grew up with me:*

*and it came out with me from my mother's womb)*

*If I have despised him that was perishing for want of clothing,*

*if his sides have not blessed me,*

*and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep*. [Job 31.16-20]

*Blessed are the clean of heart*. Job says:

*If my heart hath followed my eyes,*

*and if a spot hath cleaved to my hands...*

*If my heart hath been deceived upon a woman,*

*and if I have laid wait at my friend's door:...*

*For this is a heinous crime,*

*and a most grievous iniquity,*

*it is a fire that devoureth even to destruction,*

*and rooteth up all things that spring*. [Job 31.7,9,11-12]

As if to say: I did not want even to look at what might arouse desire, nor by looking to pursue what I desired. No spot stuck to my hands- that is, no guilt to my actions. Even if an unlawful thought crossed his mind, he never let it go as far as action. It is a fire, etc., because the fire of lust does not only stain and pollute, it swallows up until all is lost. It roots up all that springs, the seedlings of the soul's good actions: because if one does not resist the evil of lust, even things that seem to be good will perish.

*Blessed are the peacemakers*. Job says:

*If I have despised to abide judgement with my man-servant or my maid-servant,*

*when they had any controversy against me:*

*For what shall I do when God shall arise to judge?*

*And when he shall examine, what shall I answer him?*

*Did not he that made me in the womb make him also?*

*And did not one and the same form me in the womb?* [Job 31.13-15]

St Gregory[5] says: "He comes to judgement with his servants as an equal, because he fears the judgement of the One who is over all. He regards himself as a servant of the true Lord, and so he does not set himself above his servants with a haughty heart. He who does not refuse to be judged along with his man-servants and maid-servants shows that he is not proud in the presence of his neighbour. The virtue of humility is a great thing for powerful men, when they consider the equality of their condition."

21. These seven beatitudes are the seven sons of the just man, and their glory makes him noble, powerful and renowned. His three daughters are contrition, confession and

satisfaction, of which enough has been said in many places. See how great a light, how great a glory there is in Jerusalem, in holiness of life! But how much darkness there is, how many miseries, when he goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho (which means 'moon' or 'odour'), representing the waning prosperity of worldly things. The children of this world say of it, in Jeremiah:

*As for the word which thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord,*

*we will not hearken to thee:*

*But we will certainly do every word that shall proceed out of our own mouth,*

*to sacrifice to the queen of heaven and to pour out drink offerings to her...*

*Since we left off sacrifice to her ... we have wanted all things,*

*and have been consumed by the sword and by famine*. [Jer 44.16-17,18]

The queen of heaven means the moon, representing waning worldly prosperity, which carnal folk serve, thinking that if they leave off they will be consumed by famine and sword; and so they are unwilling to hear the word of the Lord.

Job did not go down to this moon; he said:

*If I have thought gold my strength,*

*and have said to fine gold: My confidence!*

*If I have rejoiced over my great riches,*

*and because my hand had gotten much:*

*If I beheld the sun when it shined,*

*and the moon going in brightness*. [Job 31.24-26]

He would indeed have lost hope in the Creator, if he had put his hope in a creature. Nothing but God satisfies the mind which seeks God in truth. He goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he falls from the light of poverty into the darkness of riches. It is told that a wolf once, seeing the moon in a well, thought it was a cheese. When, on the advice of a fox, he climbed into the well and found nothing, he had to stay there in sorrow; and when the villagers found him there, they stoned him to death. Just like that is a religious who 'sees the moon going in brightness', in the well of worldly vanity. Like a

fool, he believes the fox (carnal desire) that tells him that something transitory and changeable is true and enduring. Being deceived, he goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho, from the height of contemplation into the well of cupidity; and so he falls among robbers, who strip him, wound him, and leave him half dead.

The robbers are the five bodily senses, to which there is a **concordance** in Job:

*His robbers have come together,*

*and have made themselves a way by me,*

*and have besieged my tabernacle round about.* [Job 19.12]

The robber lies in wait to catch someone. The bodily senses, lying his under an appearance of being necessary, set traps of pleasure. They come together, so as to deceive more readily, and make a highway through the wretched soul, leading to death. The tabernacle of our body is besieged round about by them, so that whatever way the soul wants to go, it falls among them, and they despoil it of grace and wound it in nature. There is a **concordance** in the same part of Job:

*He hath hedged my path round about, and I cannot pass;*

*and in my way he hath set darkness.*

*He hath stripped me of my glory, and hath taken the crown from my head.*

*He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am lost.*

*And he hath taken away my hope, as from a tree that is plucked up*. [Job 19.8-10]

The path of the wretched soul is hedged about when, being devoted to the bodily senses, it is unable to fulfil the good that it sees should be done. The darkness is set in its way, when it cannot even discern what should be done. It is stripped of glory when it is stripped of the grace of the Holy Spirit; its crown is taken away when it is deprived of the mind’s pure intention, and so it is destroyed and perishes, and it is like a tree without the root of humility, plucked up by the wind of the devil’s tempting from the ground of eternal stability, and no hope of divine mercy remains to it.

**(A theme for a sermon on the penitence of the just man: *Let the day perish*.)**

22. See how great a misery he falls into when he goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho! He should mourn and weep like Job, who said:

*Let the day perish wherein I was born,*

*and the night in which it was said: A man-child is conceived.*

*Let that day be turned into darkness:*

*let not God regard it from above, and let it not be in remembrance,*

*and let not the light shine upon it.*

*Let the darkness and the shadow of death cover it,*

*let a mist overspread it:*

*and let it be wrapped in bitterness.*

*Let a darksome whirlwind sieze upon that night:*

*let it not be counted in the days of the year,*

*nor numbered in the months.*

*Let that night be solitary, and not worthy of praise.*

*Let them curse it who curse the day,*

*who are ready to raise up Leviathan.*

*Let the stars be darkened with the mist thereof:*

*let it expect light and not see it,*

*nor the rising of the dawning of the day.*

*Because it shut not up the doors of the womb that bore me,*

*nor took away evils from my eyes.*

*Why did I not die in the womb?*

*Why did I not perish when I came out of the belly?*

*Why received upon the knees?*

*Why suckled at the breasts?* [Job 3.3-12]

Note that ‘the day’ is delight in sin; ‘the night’ is blindness of mind. Man is referred to under three aspects: by nature, by guilt and by weakness. Man is born in the day, conceived in the night. He would not have been caught by sin’s allure if he had not been weakened by a darkened mind. ‘Let the day perish’ means, let delight in sin be destroyed by the vigour of justice. ‘Let the night’ means, let penitence extinguish what the blinded mind commits by consenting to the unforeseen allurements of sin. But so that guilt, which begins to attract, should not draw into destruction, ‘day is turned to darkness’: that is, when pleasure arises that draws to final destruction, it is seen, and tormented by penance. If it is so punished, ‘God will not regard it’ at the judgement, to punish it, and the light will not shine on it. It is illuminated by the accusing light, but it is, as it were, covered: because it is not recalled to the judge’s memory. Whence: *Blessed are they whose sins are covered* [Ps 31.1], so that they are not made manifest to human sight. ‘Let not the light shine’ on them, but let pleasure’s daylight be covered, so that it be not seen by the All-seeing; covered either by the laments of penitence or by the secret judgements of God, whereby prevenient grace frees us, which we do not know how to deserve. ‘And the shadow of death’, the death of Christ according to the flesh, which destroys our double death. He lay in the tomb one day and two nights, since he joined the light of his simple death to the darkness of our double death. It is truly a ‘death’ that separates the soul from God, and a ‘shadow’ that separates flesh from soul. (Another interpretation is that ‘shadow of death’ is forgetfulness, because its effect is to remove something from our memory, as death removes from life).

‘Let a mist overspread’ refers to a confusion of the mind leading to glory; ‘let it be wrapped’ on every side in the bitterness of penitence. ‘Let a dark whirlwind possess that night’, meaning the stormy whirlwind that is calmed by the spirit of sorrow, overshadowing the mind with sadness. This is *the wind that breaks the ships of Tharsis* [Ps 47.8], the force of compunction which with its healing moisture confuses the ‘sea’, minds devoted to the world. ‘Let it not be counted in the days of the year’: the year of our enlightenment is perfected when the Judge comes and our pilgrimage is complete. The ‘days of the year’ are individual virtues, the ‘months’ are the many deeds of virtue. But since he is afraid that the Judge may requite his evil deeds, he prays that his good deeds will be rewarded in a way that does not also demand satisfaction for the evil deeds. If this night should be numbered with the days, everything would be dark; so ensure that it is not so numbered, and no sin escape punishment, by not adding further sin by defending what one has done. ‘Let that night be solitary, unworthy of praise’. There are people who praise and defend what is evil, and so increase guilt so that it does not remain alone. To them, Ecclesiasticus says, *Hast thou sinned? Do so no more* [Ecclus 21.1], that is, do not sin further by defending sin. Anyone who does not seek after worldly success is a good fighter against sin.

‘Let them curse it who curse the day’. By doing penance, they strike a blow against the night; the trample down the light of prosperity, and reject the day of pleasure. Alternatively, the ‘day’ means the enemy’s temptation, and the meaning is that they truly

punish what has been committed when they detect the tempter's snares at the very start of his smooth talk, as they raise Leviathan further against themselves (see the Gospel, *When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man* [Lent III]). He adds: Let the stars be darkened with the mist thereof (that is, of the night); because when vice is overcome, there may still remain some slight thing unconquered, lest the victor become proud. Though they shine with virtue, they drag the remains of night along, still struggle against what is around them. So they shine all the better, because they endure this shadow humbly and unwillingly. The Book of Joshua tells how, in the promised land, the Canaanites were not killed, but made tributary to the tribe of Ephraim [cf. Jos 17.13]. When we enter the heavenly realm in hope, some vices remain even among the best things, and they serve us as a means to humility; so that whoever cannot overcome a slight fault will not get proud. Again,

*These are the nations which the Lord left, that by them he might instruct Israel*. [Jg 3.1]

These are the vices by which the just man is always attacked, and as long as he is afraid of being overcome he represses spiritual pride, and learns from small things that he cannot by his own power overcome greater. Alternatively, *Let the stars be darkened with the mist thereof*, because the night (consent to sin, inherited from Adam) so darkens the eye that even those who light the world like stars cannot see the eternal light as it really is. This is the meaning of, *Let it expect light and not see it*, because however ardently they strive upwards, they cannot in the flesh see the light as it is, because of the blindness due to original sin, in which they have been born.

*Nor the rising of the dawning of the day*. The dawning of the day is the new birth of the resurrection, in which the saints arise in the flesh to see the eternal light. But however much the elect may shine here, they cannot penetrate what will be the glory of the new birth. This night does not shut, it opens the gates of the womb; because once man has been conceived in sin, he unlocks the desires of concupiscence. When these gates, the desires of carnal concupiscence, are unlocked, we are drawn into countless evils of corruption. So we groan under our burdens, because justice demands that what we do of our own free will, we should suffer for even against our will.

*Why did I not die in the womb?* The womb wherein man is conceived to sin is evil suggestion. Would that I had died there, would that I had known I was dead, rather than let temptation draw me into taking pleasure in it! Why did I not perish as soon as I came out of the womb? Someone 'comes out of the womb' when sin has been conceived, and then outward pleasure is taken in it. But would that I had expired in that pleasure, rather than that in folly I had consented to the action! Why was I received upon knees? One is 'received upon knees' when, by the spirit's consent, all the senses and members are spread out for the commission of evil, as knees are spread for a child. Why suckled at the breasts? One is 'suckled at the breasts' when one is fed on broken promises and smooth excuses. See how guilt is first hidden in the act itself, as in a womb; then it is displayed shamelessly before men, and is out of the womb; then it goes on to become a habit, and is as it were taken on the knees; finally it is fed on either false hope or despair, and so is suckled at the breast.

**(Against hypocrites, and those who seek positions of honour: *It chanced that a priest went down*; and: *Abimelech fought*; and: *They are like wild asses*; and the rest that follows.)**

23. See with how great a lamentation the man who goes down from Jerusalem should mourn and repent. The story goes on:

*And it chanced that a certain priest went down the same way, and seeing him, passed by. In like manner also a levite, when he was near the place and saw him, passed by*. [Lk 10.31-32]

The priest represents the love of domination, and the Levite hypocrisy. There is something similar to these two in the Book of Judges, where we read that Abimelech fought stoutly to capture the tower:

*and approaching the gate, he endeavoured to set fire to it. And behold, a certain woman, casting a piece of millstone from above, dashed it against the head of Abimelech, and broke his skull. And he called hastily to his armourbearer, and said to him: Draw thy sword, and kill me: lest it should be said that I was slain by a woman. He did as he was commanded, and slew him*. [Jg 9.52-54]

Let us see what is meant by Abimelech, the tower, the gateway, the fire, the woman, the piece of millstone, the skull and the armourbearer of Abimelech.

Abimelech's name means 'my father is king'. He is someone who, like a father and king, wants to take precedence over others. The tower is a position of honour, which he approaches in order to possess it. But to climb it more easily, he sets the fire of gold and silver (which the prophet calls*, a fire in the house of the wicked* [cf. Mic 6.10]) to the gate, that is to those who are as it were the Church's gateways, so that when he has scorched them with this fire he may climb through them into the tower. Alternatively, the gate represents those curial doorkeepers and notaries who are the worst of cheats. They suck the blood of the poor, and empty the purses of the rich, so as to bestow the contents of them on their 'nephews' and 'nieces': or, rather, their sons and daughters! They pigeon-hole petitions and grab gold and silver pieces for them. Job says of them:

*Fire shall devour their tabernacles, who love to take bribes*; [Job 15.35]

and:

*The tabernacles of robbers* (or thieves) *abound, and they provoke God boldly;*

*whereas it is he that hath given all into their hands*. [Job 12.6]

and:

*Like wild asses in the desert they go forth to their work:*

*by watching for a prey they get bread for their children (and nephews!).*

*They send men away naked, taking away their clothes...*

*Out of the cities they have made men to groan,*

*and the soul of the wounded hath cried out:*

*and God doth not suffer it to pass unrevenged.*

*They have been rebellious to the light...* [Job 24.5,7,12-13]

which is why they will be deprived of the light of grace and glory. Unhappy Abimelech, who wanted to get ahead, but not to get better. He hastened on his journey, not afraid of the deceit of innkeepers, the cold of the Alps, the heat of Italy, the perils of Tuscany, the thieves of Rome! He got as far as the gate, and set fire to it. He was relieved of his gold and encumbered with lead; he was left in suspense and- well, what happened next to this would-be climber, we shall see!

*And behold, a woman*: this woman is the flesh, and the piece of millstone with which she breaks his skull is anxious ambition which distracts his mind here below, and afterwards he himself will be crushed by the blow of the severe Judge. Job says:

*He shall flee from weapons of iron,*

*and shall fall upon a bow of brass.*

*The sword is drawn out, and cometh forth from its scabbard,*

*and glittereth in his bitterness*. [Job 20.24-25]

St Gregory[6] says that the weapons of iron are the necessities of this present life, which press hard. Bronze stands for the eternal sentence, which because it is not heeded by the wicked is likened to a bow that strikes from hiding. Let him 'flee from the weapons of iron', then, because while he greedily grabs many things out of fear of present needs, he exposes himself to the blows of eternal judgement. 'Drawn out and coming forth', the wicked man who plots evil in his heart is like a sword in its scabbard. He is drawn out and comes forth when his wickedness becomes apparent in evil deeds. 'Glittering' indicates a showiness in striking. Someone who harms other people from a place of

power may be said to ‘glitter’, because the life of good people is tormented as by a lightning flash from on high against those good people.

*And he called his armourbearer*. The squire who carries the weapons, but does not fight with them, is hypocrisy. The wretched Abimelech preferrred to perish from this, rather than from the ‘woman’, the works of the flesh. Job says of them both:

*When time shall be, the ostrich setteth up her wings on high.* [Job 39.18]

The ostrich, whose feathers are like those of the heron and the hawk, represents the hypocrite who decks his wings with the plumage of a sanctity that does not belong to him. Its wings (thoughts) are tiny, but it flaps them when it can. The hypocrite makes a great display when he gets the chance, but meanwhile he hides his thoughts within (as though folding his wings to his body), so as to appear holy. Surely we see here the priest who offers tribute of gold and silver, as sacrifices to gods of whom it is said: *All the gods of the gentiles are devils* [Ps 95.5]; and here is his minister, the Levite, as well.

24. We read that the priest and the Levite, when they saw the man who was wounded, robbed and half dead, ignored him and passed by. There is a **concordance** to this in Job:

*When (the ostrich) leaveth her eggs on the earth,*

*thou perhaps will warm them in the dust?*

*She forgetteth that the foot may tread upon them,*

*or that the beasts of the field may break them.*

*She is hardened against her young ones,*

*as though they were not hers*. [Job 39.14-16]

The ostrich represents the hypocrite, who seeks a high place in the world. She leaves her eggs, the offspring she has produced, and does not care about them at all, that without careful advice and watchful discipline they may be led astray by bad example, or crushed by the beasts of the field. The field is the world, and the beast is the devil who lies in wait for his earthly prey: despoiling and wounding the soul going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and feeding daily upon human death. The implication is that the hypocrite does not care at all if the devil prowls around the world, and seizes those whose lives are good. In this way ‘she is hardened against her young ones’. The person not infused with the grace of charity regards his neighbour as a stranger, even if he himself brought him to birth in God. it is appropriate that the passage begins, *She leaveth her eggs on the earth*. To leave one’s eggs on the earth is to leave one’s

children without a heavenly example; yet heavenly care does not abandon them, as is shown in the words: *Thou perhaps will warm them in the dust?* It is as though to say, I will warm them in the dust, warm them with the fire of my love, the souls of these little ones who are set in the midst of sinners (who are as dust *which the wind blows from the face of the earth* [cf. Ps 1.4]).

25. So the Gospel continues, appropriately:

*But a certain Samaritan, being on his journey, came near him; and seeing him, was moved with compassion. And going up to him, bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine; and setting him upon his own beast, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two pence, and gave to the host*... [Lk 10.33-35]

The Samaritan (meaning 'guard') represents the grace of the Holy Spirit, of which Job says:

*Who will grant me that I may be according to the months past,*

*according to the days in which God kept me?*

*When his lamp shined over my head:*

*and I walked by his light in darkness?*

*As I was in the days of my youth,*

*when God was secretly in my tabernacle?*

*When the Almighty was with me:*

*and my servants round about me?* [Job 29.2-5]

The soul, going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and falling among thieves, sees itself stripped and wounded. It thinks about its Baptismal innocence, the sweetness of contemplation, and the original purity of its life; and it sighs and weeps, saying: *Who will grant me that I may be according to the months past* (perfection of life), *according to the days* (clear conscience and shining example) *in which God kept my going in and my coming out?* Going in to contemplation, coming out to activity. Going in to self knowledge, coming out to set a good example to my neighbour. *When his lamp* (grace) *shined over my head* (my mind), *and I walked by his light in darkness* (by ways of justice, among false brethren). Alas, alas! Who will grant me to be as in the days of my youth, of my Baptismal innocence and pure life? When God was secretly in my tabernacle, that I might make progress inwardly, in secret. Hypocrisy makes a public show of weeping, not secretly. When I had left this secret place, I fell among thieves; but while I was hidden

the Almighty was with me, and my servants were round me, my bodily senses that served me purely and faithfully. But alas, alas! Unhappy me, when I went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when I left my secret place! My servants became robbers to me, stripping me and wounding me. But the grace of the Holy Spirit, who prays, and makes to *pray with unutterable groanings* [cf. Rom 8.26], who is "Father of the poor, giver of all gifts, the soul's true radiancy"[7] : let us see what He does for the wounded soul!

He bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine. Oil, which gives light, is the knowledge of sin; wine, which inebriates, is the compunction of tears, which inebriates the soul in forgetfulness of temporal things. Inebriation also stimulates tears. There is a **concordance** to these two in Job:

*By what way is the light spread,*

*and heat divided upon the earth?*

*Who gave a course to violent showers,*

*or a way for noisy thunder,*

*that it should rain on the earth?* [Job 38.24-26]

The way is the grace of the Holy Spirit, by whom the light (knowledge of sin) is scattered; and then the heat (the ardour of contrition) is divided upon the earth, making the sinner himself divide the totality of his sin, piece by piece, sin and circumstances. Thus it gives course to violent showers (compunction of tears), whose vehemence breaks down the barriers of guilt and shame, and makes way for the noisy thunder; that is, it opens the way to confession, which, like thunder, terrifies the devils. So it says in the first Book of Kings:

*The Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and terrified them; and they were overthrown before the face of Israel*. [1Kg(Sm) 7.10]

In the thunder and the sword of confession, the Philistines (the devils) are terrified and overthrown by the children of Israel (true penitents). How appropriate, then, the words: Pouring in oil and wine, he bound up his wounds. The grace of the Holy Spirit binds the wounds of the soul when he guarantees to the penitent the hope of pardon and the robe of glory.

*And placing him on his beast*, etc. The beast of burden is obedience, as the psalmist says: *I am become a beast before thee* [Ps 72.23]. When the soul is subjected to another's will, it is supported by it; while it carries, it is carried. The smelly inn is the stench of wickedness, the inn-keeper is the spirit of contrition. The two pence are two kinds of compunction- for what one has done, and what one has failed to do. The

penitent should mourn because he has done what he was forbidden, and failed to do what he was commanded. The sinner's soul is wounded, but it is soothed by the poultice of the Holy Spirit. It is carried on the beast of obedience to the stinking inn of its own wickedness, there to sit with Job who (we are told),

*took a potsherd and scraped the corrupt matter, sitting on a dung-hill*. [Job 2.8]

A potsherd is made of clay, moulded while it is still soft, and then baked. When baked, it represents the roughness of penance, with which the penitent, as he 'sits on the dunghill', humbling himself in the stink of his wickedness, should scrape the pus of his sins. Pus arise from the blood, which when a wound is fevered becomes pus: the blood putrefies. So the putrefaction of sin should be scraped with the potsherd of penance. And note: no-one can return to Jerusalem unless he is placed on the beast of obedience. That is why the Lord entered Jerusalem riding on an ass. Of this beast, Nehemiah said:

*And there was no place for the beast on which I rode*. [Neh 2.14]

Our body should be like a humble beast, obedient and docile, and the soul should ride upon it. it should have no place in the world, because man's place is above all things: as the psalmist says:

*Thou hast set him over the works of thy hands.* [Ps 8.7]

Note also that Natural History teaches us that when a beast is on heat, it will calm down if its hair is shaved. That is what we should do with our body; when it wants to run riot in the abundance of temporal things, or indulge itself in the wantonness of the flesh, we should disfigure it and shave its head like an idiot. So we are told that Job *shaved his head and fell down upon the ground* [Job 1.20]. We are accustomed to shave the head when it is itchy, or weighed down with severe sickness. When our body is itchy and infirm, we should shave the hair of riches and pleasures, so that like a meek animal it may be able to bear us to the city of Jerusalem.

So, dear brothers, let us ask the grace of the Holy Spirit, that He may pour into our soul's wounds the oil and wine of his mercy; that he may bandage them, and set us upon the beast of obedience; that he may lead us to the inn that is the remembrance of our sins, and commend us to the inn-keeper who is the spirit of contrition; so that we may stay under his care until, for the two pence of double compunction, we may recover the original health which we have lost. So, being recovered, may we be able to return to that Jerusalem from which we fell. May he grant this, who with the Father and the Son lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Let every penitent soul say, Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Job 11.14-17

[2] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Job 31.34

[3] AUGUSTINE, *De sermone Domini in monte*, II,1; PL 34.1269

[4] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Job 30.28

[5] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Job 31.13-15

[6] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Job 20.24-25

[7] Sequence for Pentecost

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

[PROLOGUE FOR OCTOBER]

We give thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the guide and the way whereby we have reached the first Sunday of the month of October. Note, then, that from the first of October to the first of November the Books of Maccabees are read in Church; and during this period there are four Sundays, in which are read four Gospels with whose clauses we will, by God's grace, **concord** certain stories of the Maccabees, as shall seem to us most appropriate.

## SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost: *When Jesus went into the house*; which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon on the preacher and prelate of the Church, and his weapons: *Judas Maccabaeus*.)**

1. At that time: *When Jesus went into the house of one of the chief of the Pharisees, on the sabbath day, to eat bread, they watched him*. [Lk 14.1]

The first Book of Maccabees tells that Judas Maccabaeus

*put on a breastplate like a giant and girt his warlike armour about him in battles and protected the camp with his sword. In his acts he was like a lion and like a lion's whelp roaring for his prey*. [1Mac 3.3-4]

Judas means 'glorifying', and Maccabaeus is 'protecting' or 'striking'; he stands for the preacher, who should glorify God, protect his neighbour and strike the devil. He *should put on a breastplate like a giant*: and note that the giant stands for constancy, and the breastplate for patience. These two are very necessary for the preacher, so that he is constant in speaking, and patient when dogs bark at him. He should *rejoice like a giant to run his course* [cf. Ps 18.6]. So Job says of him:

*He pranceth boldly; he goeth forward to meet armed men.*

*He despiseth fear; he turneth not his back to the sword*. [Job 39.21-22]

So *his going out is from the highest heaven*, the fire of charity, to strike the devil who dwells in the sinner's heart. Then the breastplate of patience is necessary to him: not of leather but of chain-mail. True patience is not made from the leather of human fear and favour, but only from the unyielding bonds of charity. A fake patience, more worldly shame and fear than the love of God, is simply afraid to avenge an injury received.

*He girt his warlike armour about him*. Of this, the Apostle says:

*Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth... and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the helmet of salvation*. [Eph 6.14]

*And he protected the camp with his sword*, the word of God entrusted to him. With it he must protect the souls of the faithful from three things- the heat of the sun (carnal temptation), the thunderstorm of worldly adversity, and the assault of the enemy, the devil. He was like a lion, of which the Apocalypse says:

*The lion of the tribe of Juda hath prevailed*; [Apoc 5.5]

and Genesis:

*Juda is a lion's whelp; to the prey, my son, thou art gone up.*

*Resting thou hast couched as a lion*. [Gen 49.9]

The preacher should take spoils, seizing the souls held captive by the devil in the hunting of his preaching; as Christ did, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who ascended the Cross to despoil the devil, entering his house and breaking open his coffers [cf. Mt 12.29]. Thus it says in today's Gospel, *When Jesus went into the house of one of the chief of the Pharisees*, etc.

2. There are three things to note in this Gospel: the entering the house of the chief, the cure of the dropsical man, and the admonition of Jesus that all should keep humility. The first*, When Jesus went in*; the second: *And behold a certain man with the dropsy*; the third*: When thou art invited to a wedding*.

In the Introit of today's Mass we sing: *Give peace, O Lord, to them that wait for thee*. The Epistle is taken from that of the blessed Apostle Paul to the Ephesians, *I, a prisoner in the Lord, beseech you*; which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the three clauses of the Gospel: first, *I beseech you*; second, *Careful to keep*; third, *One Lord*, etc. Note that this Epistle and Gospel are read together, because in the Gospel the Lord

speaks particularly of humility, whereby the unity of the Church is maintained, which the Apostle invites us to keep carefully, in today's Epistle.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(The chief who is the devil: how he deceived Adam and strives daily to deceive each of the faithful: *When Jesus went in*; and: *Antiochus entered the sanctuary*.)**

3. Let us say, then:

*When Jesus went into the house of one of the chief of the Pharisees, on the sabbath day, to eat bread, they watched him*. [Lk 14.1]

Let us see what is meant by the house, the chief, the Pharisee, the sabbath and the bread.

A 'chief' is one who holds on to the first place or honour; this refers to the devil, who caught the first man with an apple, as with a fish-hook. Anyone wanting to catch a fish with a hook needs these three: line, bait, and hook. The apple had three qualities, smell, colour and taste. The smell drew like a line; the colour acted as bait; the taste caught like a hook. With such a hook the first man was caught by the chief of devils.

There is a **concordance** to this in the First Book of Maccabees, where it tells that:

*Antiochus proudly entered the sanctuary and took away the golden altar and the candlestick of light... and the table of proposition... and the golden ornament that was before the temple*. [1Mac 1.23]

Antiochus means 'silence of the poor', and he represents the devil who impoverished the first man of so great a glory, keeping silent about death but promising that he would be like God. With the pride that caused him to be cast out of heaven, he entered the sanctuary of paradise, and took away the golden altar of a pure heart, whereon the incense of devotion was offered. In the Apocalypse, John says:

*I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before the eyes of God.* [Apoc 9.13]

The golden altar is a pure heart, and it has four corners, the four principal virtues, from which comes the voice of contrition and confession. This altar is always before the eyes of God, because he looks mercifully upon it. Thus Isaiah says, *Whom shall I respect, but the humble and quiet.. ?* [cf. Is 66.2].

He took the candlestick of light, putting out the light of reason, of which the Lord says in Matthew:

*If the light that is in thee be darkness; the darkness itself how great shall it be!* [Mt 6.23]

And the table of proposition, the sweetness of contemplation of which the Psalm says:

*Thou hast prepared a table before me*. [Ps 22.5]

And the golden ornament, charity, which adorns the face of the temple, the works of any Christian who is, as the Apostle says, the holy temple of God [cf. 1Cor 3.17]. At one time the devil took all these things from our first parent, and every day he tries to take them from each man.

He is chief 'of the Pharisees' (which means 'separated'), meaning those who separate themselves from the just and form their own sects. There is a **concordance** to them in the first Book of Maccabees:

*In those days there went out of Israel wicked men and they persuaded many, saying: Let us go and make a covenant with the heathens that are round about us; for since we departed from them many evils have befallen us. And the word seemed good in their eyes*. [1Mac 1.12-13]

The house of this chief is the world, which because of our first parent's guilt he took as his own house. The Lord entered it when he took our flesh; so it is well said*: When Jesus went into the house of one of the chief of the Pharisees*. Why did he enter? *To eat bread on the sabbath*. Note the words 'sabbath', 'eat' and 'bread'. The sabbath means 'rest', and to eat is to put something in one's mouth with one's hand. 'Bread' here stands for food in general, which every animal needs. The Lord entered the world on the sabbath, to give us rest from slavery to the devil.

**(The three accursed things the Lord destroyed by his Passion, to bring us peace: *In that day, when God shall give thee rest*; and: *The labour of Egypt*.)**

4. So Isaiah says of him:

*In that day, when God shall give thee rest from thy labour, and from thy vexation, and from the hard bondage wherewith thou didst serve before, thou shalt take up this parable against the king of Babylon, and shalt say: How is the oppressor come to nothing, the tribute hath ceased? The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, the rod of the rulers, that struck the people in wrath with an incurable wound, that brought nations under in fury, that persecuted in a cruel manner. The whole earth is quiet and still: it is glad and hath rejoiced*. [Is 13.3-7]

On that day when the light rose in the darkness, Jesus Christ the Son of God, he gave us rest from our labour, from vexation and from bondage. John says in his Epistle:

*All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh* (labour) *and the concupiscence of the eyes* (avarice, which is vexation) *and the pride of life* (hard slavery to the devil). [1Jn 2.16]

Of these three the Father says to the Son, in Isaiah:

*The labour of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and of Sabaim men of stature, shall come over to thee and shall be thine. They shall walk after thee, they shall go bound with manacles. And they shall worship thee and shall make supplication to thee*. [Is 45.14]

Egypt means 'the trouble that constrains', the concupiscence of the flesh, which troubles and binds the soul. Ethiopia is 'darkness' or 'gloom', the concupiscence of avarice which darkens the eyes of the wise. Sabaim are 'captives', under the hard bondage of the devil, tall with pride. The Lord opposes three things to them: innocence of life against the labour of the flesh, poverty of spirit against the vexation or business of avarice, and the blood of his Passion against the haughtiness of pride. The Lord gives you these things (rest from the labour of Egypt, from the vexation and business of Ethiopia, from the bondage of the devil and the elation of pride, showing them in himself for your imitation), through the humility of his Passion; and he will give a fuller rest when this mortal puts on immortality.

Then you will take up a parable against the king of Babylon, the sting of the flesh, the world and the devil, and you will say, *How is the oppressor come to nothing*, the tyrannous flesh that daily demands its pennyworth of pleasure; *the tribute hath ceased*, of avarice and cupidity; *The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, the rod of the rulers*- their dignity and pride which struck peoples, subjugated nations and cruelly persecuted. Then the earth, our flesh, will be quiet, resting in unity with the spirit from the labour of temptation; it will be still from the vexation of worldly desire, and it will rejoice and be glad, free from the slavery of the devil's pride. It is well said then, *When Jesus went into the house of one of the chief of the Pharisees on the sabbath*.

5. There follows: *To eat*; Christ ate, putting the hand of action to the mouth of preaching. Hear how Christ ate: *Jesus began to do and to teach* [Acts 1.1]; *he was mighty in work and word* [Lk 24.19]. Peter was told to *kill and eat* [Acts 10.13], and the preacher is, as it were, told to kill with the sword of preaching, and to eat by 'putting his hand to his mouth'- first doing what he preaches to others. There is a **concordance** to this in the first Book of Maccabees:

*Timotheus said to the captains of his army: When Judas and his army come near the torrent of water, if he pass over unto us first, we shall not be able to withstand him: for he will certainly prevail over us; but if he is afraid to pass over and camp on the other side of the river, we will pass over to them and shall prevail against them*. [1Mac 5.40-41]

Timotheus means 'beneficent', and he represents the devil, who seems to bestow

benefits on his followers, though they are more like poisons- he should be called a poisoner rather than a benefactor. He is very afraid that Judas, the preacher, will cross the river of preaching by passing from the bank of words to the bank of deeds. If he does that, he will put Timotheus and his army to flight. But alas! Today everyone comes to the river and stands on the bank of words, but they will not cross to the bank of deeds. So the devil is not afraid of them, and their words are of less effect. As the same book says, *they are not of the seed of those who brought salvation to Israel* [cf. 1Mac 3.60]. Those men were the Apostles, who crossed the river and wrought salvation greatly among the people of God.

There follows: *Bread*; the bread is God's will, to be preferred to any other food. Judas Maccabaeus himself said: *As it shall be the will in heaven, so be it done* [1Mac 3.60]. Every work is barren, if not sustained by the bread of the divine will. God's will is for the sinner to be converted, and live; so he himself says in Isaiah:

*Thy land shall no more be called desolate, but thou shalt be called My will in her,*

*and thy land shall be inhabited, because the Lord hath been well pleased with thee*. [Is 62.4]

When the sinner is converted, the land (his mind) is indwelt by grace, and so the Lord's will, which is life, is found in it. So Jesus entered the house on the sabbath, to eat bread: that is, he came into the world to do the will of the Father, saying:

*My meat is to do the will of him that sent me.*[Jn 4.34]

And Ezekiel:

*He shall sit in the gate, to eat bread before the Lord*, [Ezek 44.3]

that is, he humbled himself in the Virgin, so as to do the Father's will. This is the living bread, and whoever eats it will not die eternally. *The flesh profiteth nothing* [Jn 6.64], meaning the will of the flesh. The bread which is the Lord's will strengthens man's heart.

So the Lord says in Exodus:

*In the evening you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread.*

*And you shall know that I am the Lord your God*. [Ex 16.12]

In the evening of guilt, when the sun of grace sets, sinners eat flesh, they fulfil their carnal wishes; but the Lord says, *My sword shall devour flesh* [Dt 32.42]. *Their flesh is as that of asses, their issue like that of horses* [Ezek 23.20]. *Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear* [Ps 118.120], he says. In the evening you will eat flesh, and in the morning, the

rising of grace, contrition of heart and renunciation of sin, you will have your fill of bread: the Lord's will, which refreshes and satisfies the penitent soul more than anything else; and then you will know that I am the Lord your God. When the evening of guilt is changed to the dawn of grace, we truly know that he is the Lord our God. Every living creature seeks this bread: *Thy will be done on earth as it is n heaven* [Mt 6.10], as if to say: Let it be done in sinners, as it is in the just. Visit the earth and inebriate it, so that it may bring forth, not thorns and thistles, but the full grain in the ear, confession in the prick of contrition; so that from it may be made the bread of your will, that strengthens man's heart.

There follows: *And they were watching him*. They set traps and watched slyly, to see if he would break the sabbath. *The sinner shall watch the just man* [Ps 36.12], as it is said. They watched, so as to catch him out, not so as to keep his words. Solomon says:

*Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is all man-* [Eccles 12.13]

all that man is made for, that is. Natural History tells that there is a small animal [a toad] that goes to where bees enter, and blows hard on it, and waits for them to come out. When one comes out and tries to fly away, it catches and eats it. That is how the proud and crafty man goes to where bees enter (by watching the life and morals, the words and works of the just, whereby they enter the kingdom), and 'blows' (by praise or blame). He thinks that by praise he may puff them up with praise, or cast them down with vituperation; and he watches to see if any of them is carried away by conceit when praised, or by angry words when criticised. Then he immediately pulls them up and condemns their behaviour.

*As gold in the furnace, so a man is tried by the mouth of him that praiseth.* [Prov 27.21]

The fire of praise consumes lead and straw, but adds brightness to gold and silver. When a man is injured, it shows up what he is like inside.

**(The five things the Apostle speaks of in the first clause of the Epistle: *I beseech you*.)**

6. The first part of today's Epistle is **concordant** with this first clause:

*I, therefore, a prisoner in the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called; with all humility and mildness, with patience, supporting one another in charity*. [Eph 4.1]

In this first part, the Apostle mentions five things: walking worthily, humility, mildness, patience and charity. We should walk worthily, so that the prince of darkness does not catch us; with all humility, against the pride of the Pharisees; with mildness, to keep the sabbath devoutly; with patience, to be able to eat the bread of the divine will; supporting in charity those who watch us, criticise and abuse us.

The Introit of today's Mass is **concordant** with this part of the Epistle:

*Give peace to them that wait for thee, that thy prophets may be found faithful;*

*hear the prayers of thy servant and of thy people Israel*. [cf. Ecclus 36.18]

The same is sung in the history for this Sunday, in the Second Book of Maccabees:

*May he open your heart in his law and in his commandments and send you peace*.[2Mac 1.4]

When the heart is opened by compunction, the law of grace is written with God's finger on it, and his commandments are kept and his peace is bestowed; so that the sabbath of the mind is kept, the bread of the divine will is eaten to satisfaction, and critical observation is borne in charity. So the prophets, just men and holy preachers, are found faithful, and the prayers of the faithful people are heard.

We ask you, then, Lord Jesus Christ, to enter the house of our conscience, and cast out the chief of the Pharisees, the movement of evil thoughts which divide the mind and distract the heart. Restore the sabbath of rest and peace to our minds, make us eat the bread of your will, so that we may be able to attain you, the bread of angels. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(The theme for a sermon on the waters of concupiscence: *The waters of Nemrim*; and of the nature of the leopard, and its meaning.)**

7. The second clause follows:

*And, behold, there was a certain man before him that had the dropsy. And Jesus, answering,spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying: Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? But they held their peace. But he, taking him, healed him and sent him away*. [Lk 14.2-4]

The Gloss comments: "Dropsy (*hydropsis*, from the Greek for water) is a watery disease. Strictly, dropsy is when the more one drinks the more one is thirsty, and so it is a likeness of one who gets worse the more he overflows with carnal pleasures; and it is also a likeness of the rich miser." The waters of carnal pleasure and of worldly greed generate a dropsy of the soul, which is insatiable. These are the waters which cause a cursed swelling, and if anyone drinks *them their belly and thigh shall rot* [cf. Num 5.22,27]. They are the waters of Egypt, which were turned into blood [cf. Ex 7.19-20], and the waters of which Isaiah said:

*The waters of Nemrim shall be desolate, for the grass is withered away:*

*the spring is faded, all the greenness is perished.*

*According to the greatness of their work is their visitation also:*

*they shall lead them to the torrent of the willows*. [Is 15.6-7]

Nemrim means 'leopard', a most savage beast which rushes headlong towards blood, and as it leaps it falls to its death. Natural History says that when the leopard eats something poisonous, it looks for human excrement and eats it. Because of this, hunters put such excrement in jars in the treetops, and when the leopard comes to the trees and jumps up to get the excrement, they kill it. The leopard stands for the proud, worldly man, covered with the spots of all sorts of sins. When he is inflamed by the poison of the devil's temptation, he looks for the dung of temporal things, to eat them and make them his own. *I reckon everything as dung, to gain Christ*, said the Apostle [cf. Phil 3.8]; and the Lord told Ezekiel to cover his bread with human excrement [cf. Ezek 4.12]. The 'bread' is the thought and action of the sinner, covered with the dung of greed and lust, pride and avarice. The devil, hunting, puts dung in the tree, to capture more easily. The might tree is temporal dignity, which though thought to be firmly rooted is plucked up by the wind of death and thrown into the infernal sea. So Job says:

*I have seen a fool with a strong root: and I cursed his beauty immediately*. [Job 5.3]

The devil puts the dung in the tree for food, and when the proud man jumps up to get it, to eat the dung of greed and lust, vainglory and money, he is killed by the devil. So the waters of Nemrim shall be desolate.

There is a **concordance** to this in the second Book of Maccabees, where

*Antiochus, being filled with pride, breathing out fire... and commanding the matter to be hastened, it happened as he was going with violence that he fell from the chariot, so that his limbs were much pained by a grievous bruising of the body. Thus he that seemed to himself to command even the waves of the sea, being proud above the condition of man, and to weigh the heights of the mountains in a balance, now being cast down to te ground, was carried in a litter... And the man that thought a little before that he could reach to the stars of heaven, no man could endure to carry for the intolerable stench*. [2Mac 9.7-8,10]

See how the waters of Nemrim are desolate!

The grass of temporal glory withers, the shoots of children, nephews and parents fail, and all the vigour of carnal pleasure, gluttony and lust, dies. It will be according to the greatness of the works and wickedness of the proud, and their visitation, because

punishment is in proportion to guilt; and the demons who drove them on will make them drink from the cup they have prepared for themselves; and will drive them naked and wretched, with their hands bound behind them, to the brook of willows- of eternal punishment- where no order, but *everlasting horror dwelleth* [Job 10.22]. These are the waters that swell the mind, that generate the dropsy, and the more they are drunk the more the increase thirst.

**(The dropsical man, the miser: *And behold, a man*.)**

8. *And, behold, there was a certain man before him that had the dropsy*. The dropsical man is the miser, avaricious, avid for gold and never satisfied with what he has. As the body breathes in air, the miser takes in money; he is like a bottomless pit. The Psalmist says, *Deep calleth upon deep* [Ps 41.8], and the deep of gluttony calls upon the deep of lust, the deep of consumption calls on the deep of expenditure, the deep of money calls for the deep of hell. Well may this dropsical man say with the prophet Jonah:

*The waters compassed me about even to the soul:*

*the deep hath closed me round about:*

*the sea hath covered my head.* [Jon 2.6]

The waters are the pleasures of the flesh, which hold the soul like an enemy besieged in his castle. The deep is that bottomless cupidity that walls the soul about lest it escape to freedom. The sea is pride, that covers the head (the mind) lest it see the truth.

These three are found in the Psalm: firstly,

*Save me, O God: for the waters are come in even unto my soul*. [Ps 68.2]

secondly,

*I stick fast in the mire of the deep: and there is no sure standing*. [Ps 68.3]

When the unhappy soul amasses passing riches, it loses those that are eternal; as Ecclesiasticus says:

*Riches are good to him that hath no sin in his conscience*. [Ecclus 13.30]

Take note of ‘stick fast’, ‘in the mire’ and ‘of the deep’. The mire is smooth, and the miser by his cupidity sticks fast in the mire of pleasure, but deep in despair. Solomon says:

*The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth.* [Prov 18.3]

He despairs, lacking all hope of getting out; because anyone who loves sin can have no hope of future glory. Thirdly,

*I am come into the depth of the sea: and a tempest hath overwhelmed me*. [Ps 68.3]

The depth of the sea is the depth of pride, a tempest that sinks man in the abyss of hell. O Lord Jesus, stretch out your hand and grasp this dropsical man, compassed about by the waters, closed round by the deep and buried in the sea!

**(How the Lord, with the hand of his mercy, draws the sinner from his wickedness: *Tobias took the fish*.)**

9. *But Jesus, taking him, healed him and sent him away*. Note that he took, he healed and he sent away. The Lord takes the sinner when he reaches out the hand of his mercy and pulls him out of the sea of sin. The Book of Tobias tells how Tobias took the huge fish and pulled it onto dry land. He gutted it and took its liver, gall and heart [cf. Tob 6.4-5]. The huge fish is the sinner, entangled in great sins, whom 'Tobias' (Jesus Christ) takes with the hand of his mercy and pulls from the depth of despair onto the dry land of penance- dry and moistureless, like sackcloth! Penance is that dry place, the moisture of greed and lust being dried with the sackcloth of penance. As the Psalmist says:

*In a desert land, and where there is no way and no water*. [Ps 62.3]

(See the Gospel: *When the unclean spirit goeth out of a man* [Lent III].)

The Lord removes the entrails from this fish when he cuts the sinner with the sword of his fear, and removes the liver of lustful love, the gall of greed for gold (grievously hard, for "You get it with toil, you keep it with fear, you lose it with grief"[1] ); and the swelling heart of pride. Jeremiah says of the liver:

*My liver is poured upon the earth*. [Lam 2.11]

This happens when someone, through earthly desires, is poured out in lustful pleasures. Peter says of the gall, to Simon Magus:

*For I see thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity*. [Acts 8.23]

Whoever toils in simony and avarice, suffers bitterness of mind and bondage in his activity. Job says of the heart:

*Why doth thy heart elevate thee,*

*and why dost thou stare with thy eyes, as if they were thinking great things?*

*Why doth thy spirit swell against God, to utter such words out of thy mouth?* [Job 15.12-13]

There follows healing. The Lord heals the sinner when he cures his soul of all the weakness of sin: *Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee* [Ps 40.5]. The healthy man has blood in his face, taking away his pallor. The blood of tears shows health in the soul. Tears as it were 'tear' the mind, and when you are torn with sorrow, the tears flow like blood and wet your cheeks, so that:

*Thy cheeks are rosy, like a piece of pomegranate,*

*besides that* (contrition of heart) *which lieth hid within*. [cf. Cant 4.3]

[The Lord said:]

*Behold, thou art healed; see that nothing worse happen to thee*. [cf. Jn 5.14]

And to Hezekiah:

*I have heard thy prayer, and I have seen thy tears; and behold I have healed thee*. [cf. Is 38.5]

Prayer and tears make a sort of poultice, driving out the inflammation of the soul.

**(The penitent, who should cut away from himself everything that is superfluous: *Immediately Sephora took a very sharp stone*.)**

Thirdly, sending away. The Lord dismisses the converted sinner by letting him depart in the joy of a good conscience, free from all the bonds of guilt, punishment and the devil's temptation.

*Loose him, and let him go.* [Jn 11.4]

The disciples said:

*Send her away, for she crieth after us*, [Mt 15.23]

and there is something similar in Exodus, where

*Immediately Sephora took a very sharp stone, and circumcised the foreskin of her son, and touched his feet, and said: A bloody spouse art thou to me. And he let him go after she had said: A bloody spouse, because of the circumcision*. [Ex 4.25-26]

Literally, this is to be understood (after Augustine[2] ) that the blood touched the feet of the boy; so that she angrily said to her husband Moses, "Are you a bloody husband to me? Have I been forced by marriage to you to commit so great a sin as to shed my own son's blood?" But an alternative meaning is that Sephora touched Moses' feet, indignantly throwing the foreskin at his feet, and saying (as the Hebrew idiom is) "You are a son-in-law of blood to me, that is, you have so become a son-in-law of blood to my father, that you have brought me (my flesh, my son) to blood, that is, to death."

Morally, Sephora ('a bird') represents the penitent, who should be winged with virtues, like a bird. With the sharp stone of contrition of heart, she should circumcise the foreskin of her son, cutting away what is superfluous. The foreskin covers the private part, and often superfluity prevents us seeing that of which we should be ashamed. Let it be cut away, then, that the blood of tears may flow, touching and washing the feet of our child, our works. If our affection (our will) is clean, our effects (our deeds) will be sanctified. After this circumcision, the Lord lets the man go free, back to his brothers and his house with a clear conscience.

10. *And answering them he said: Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a pit and will not immediately draw him out, on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him to these things*. [Lk 14.5-6]

The Gloss says, "The dropsied man, suffering from harmful fluid, is appropriately compared to an animal in a pit." Let us see what the ass, the ox and the pit mean. The ass, who avoids heights, is strong in his hindparts but lowly in his forequarters, where he bears a cross. The ass is the lustful man, who avoids the heights of holy conversation, and goes by the plains of pleasure. He is weak in works of the cross, and spiritual toil, but he is strong in his loins, wherein is lust. Regarding the ass, see the Gospels: *Jesus was led* [Lent I]; and: *When Jesus drew nigh to Jerusalem* [Palm Sunday];

The ox stands for the proud man, horned and charging with the horn of pride. Regarding horns, see the Gospel: *When a strong man armed* [Lent III, third clause]. The ass and the ox, the lustful man and the proud rich man, represented by the dropsied man, fall into the pit of sin from which they have to be pulled with old cloths, as Jeremiah tells that Abdemelech did, taking old rags and old clothes falling apart, and letting them down by cords to Jeremiah in the pit, to pull him out [cf. Jer 38.11,13]. These old rags are the poverty and humility of Jesus Christ, who was wrapped in cloths we may well call 'old'. We usually give old clothes to other people, not keeping the poverty and humility of Jesus Christ ourselves, or dressing ourselves in them, but freely giving them and preaching them to others! Nowadays, the preacher tries hard to dress other people in poverty and humility: I hope he does not leave himself naked! He wants to reform others, but he should take care that he does not himself remain unreformed. The decaying clothes are the examples of the saints, which our rotten age despises and casts away as useless. We give the old to others, and the decayed we cast away! O sinner, you will never get out of *the pit of misery and the mire of dregs* [Ps 39.3], except by the rags of Jesus Christ's poverty and humility. With these, the ox and the ass are pulled out of the deep pit.

11. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** with this second clause:

*Careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; one body and one Spirit, as you are called in one hope of your calling*. [Eph 4.3-4]

The Gloss says: "You must keep unity, so as to be one body serving your neighbour, and one spirit with God, willing the same things; or one spirit with your brethren, with the same wishes, the same dislikes." The dropsied man (the lustful and avaricious man) does not keep this unity. He defiles his body and chokes his spirit with avarice. If he had been secured by the bond of peace, the cord of unity, he would never have fallen in the pit. Because he lacks both of them, he falls into the pit of despair.

We ask you then, Lord Jesus Christ, to grasp us with the outstretched hand of your mercy, and pull us out of the pit with the cloths of poverty and humility. Cure us of the dropsy of lust and avarice, to keep the unity of the spirit, and come to you, God three and one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever. Amen.

**(A moral sermon on unity and peace, which the devil strives to destroy; and on the nature and properties of pearls, and their meaning: *Careful to keep the unity of the spirit*, and the rest that follows.)**

12. *Careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. Note ‘careful’, ‘unity’ and ‘bond of peace’; which are very necessary for us, my brothers. The devil wanted to sow the tares of discord in heaven, and he tries to do the same in the community of penitents. So Job says:

*On a certain day, when the sons of God came to stand before the Lord, Satan also was present among them*. [Job 1.6]

Note each word: *On a certain* (not indefinite) *day* (not night*) when the sons* (adopted by grace*) of God* (by the spirit of poverty) *came* (in devotion) *to stand* (by mortification of the body*) before the Lord* (not the world*), Satan also was present among them* (to sow the seeds of discord). Brothers, we must be careful, not lazy; we must keep, not break, the unity of the spirit. Dearest brothers, we must keep the unity of the spirit with the greatest care; as carefully as sea-shells keep their pearls.

Natural History says that "In sea shells, precious stones called pearls are produced. At a certain time of year, they thirst for dew as for a husband, and gape with this desire. When a great shower of rain falls from the moon, they draw in the desired moisture with a sort of yawn. In this way they conceive and become pregnant. If what they have received is pure, the little globes are white; if it is disturbed, they have a sickly pallor, or a cloudy red colour. Thus, their birth is more from the sky than the sea. So as often as they receive the seed of the morning air, the clearer the pearls; and as often as it comes from

the evening, the darker; and the more they draw in, the larger the stone grows. If there is a sudden flash of light, they close up without delay. There is a sense in the shells, they fear that their offspring will be stained; when the day becomes hot with fiercer rays, they plunge into the depths and hide themselves from the heat under the waves, so that the stones are not discoloured by the sun's heat. In water, the pearl is soft, but it hardens in wine. You never find two the same, so they are called 'unions'. They are afraid of the fisherman's nets, so they hide among the rocks. They swim in a group, and follow a definite leader." Let us see what all this means, morally.

Sea-shells are hollow, representing penitents, humble and poor in spirit, who are empty by humbleness of heart. They thirst for dew as for a husband, as is said:

*My soul hath thirsted after the livings fountain of God*. [cf. Ps 41.3, reading '*fontem*' for '*fortem*']

The dew of heavenly grace impregnates the soul like a husband, with the intention of good works. They gape with desire for this dew, as Job says:

*My root is opened beside the waters; and dew shall continue in my harvest*. [Job 29.19]

(See the Gospel: *When Jesus was going to Jerusalem* [Pentecost XIV])

When a great shower of rain comes down from the moon, this represents prosperity, adversity and the infusion of grace. The moon's light stands for prosperity, the night for adversity, and the shower for the infusion of grace. The just ardently desire this, and drink it in with an open heart, both in the brightness of prosperity and in the night of adversity; so that prosperity does not lift them up, nor adversity cast them down. Whence Isaiah:

*My soul hath desired thee in the night:*

*yea, and with my spirit within me in the morning early I will watch to thee.* [Is 25.9]

If what they receive is pure- the infusion of grace can do two things, brighten or confuse. It enlightens the mind for contemplation, and then the pearls (the mind's affections and thoughts) are clear; as the Lord says in Hosea:

*I will be as the dew: Israel shall spring as the lily*. [Hos 14.6]

When the dew of contemplation sweetens the mind, the humble mind, like Israel, brings forth white thoughts like lilies. But grace disturbs the mind to grieve for sin, and then a pallid or red colour is effected in the pearls: pallid in the affliction of the body, red in contrition of heart. So in Canticles:

*Tell my beloved that I languish with love*. [cf. Cant 5.8]

"Every lover grows pale"[3] ; *Her back with the paleness of gold* [Ps 67.14], says the Psalmist.

So they arise from the sky rather than the sea. Those impregnated by the bitter sea of the world bring forth vipers; those by the sky, pearls. Of the former is said:

*Ye offspring of vipers, who hath shewed you to flee from the wrath to come?* [Lk 3.7]

Of the latter, in Canticles:

*The vines in flower yield their sweet smell; Thy plants are a paradise*. [Cant 2.13; 4.13]

As often as they receive the seed of the morning air, the clearer the pearls; as often as that of the evening, the darker. This is what the Psalm says:

*In the evening weeping shall have place; and in the morning gladness*. [Ps 29.6]

There is a triple evening, and a triple morning, of weeping and of gladness. The first evening was Adam's sin, wherein was weeping when he was cast out of paradise and heard:

*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread*. [Gen 3.19]

The first morning was the Nativity of Jesus Christ, wherein was gladness; the angel said:

*I bring you good tidings of great joy*. [Lk 2.10]

The second evening was the death of Christ; wherein was weeping, as Luke says:

*Jerusalem, weep not over me*, etc. [Lk 23.28]

The second morning was his Resurrection, wherein was joy:

*The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord*. [Jn 20.20]

The third evening is in every man's death, wherein is weeping; as Genesis tells,

*Sara died in the city of Arbee; and Abraham came to mourn and weep for her*. [Gen 23.2]

The third morning will be for the saints, in the general resurrection; therein, as Isaiah says,

*Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads*. [Is 35.10]

If there is a sudden flash of light, they close up without delay. The devil's flash is temptation, which the just fear exceedingly, and as soon as they feel it they squeeze themselves shut and close the doors of their senses. (See the Gospel: *When it was late that same day*, etc. [Easter Octave])

There is a sense in the shells; they are afraid their offspring will be stained. A 'sense' is a stimulus to the mind, by the body's relationship with the soul. The just are afraid that their 'offspring' (their works) will be stained, and so when the day of worldly prosperity grows hot, and smiles on them, they plunge at once into the depths, considering their frailty and the misery of wickedness, and they hide beneath waves of tears; for otherwise their pearls may be discoloured and clouded by the sun's heat, the burning of honour and human respect.

The pearl is soft in water; the just man's mind is softened in the water of pleasure; but hardened by the wine of austerity. The delinquent mind is corrected by an austere face. So Ecclesiasticus says:

*Hast thou daughters* (souls committed to you*)?*

*Have a care of their body, and show not thy countenance gay towards them*. [Ecclus 7.26]

You never find two pearls the same in one shell, because there is no 'yes and no' in the mind of a just man, no two opinions. There is no dissension there, it is a 'union', because it is careful to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Sea-shells fear the fisherman's nets, because the just fear the snares of the devil's temptations, who puts his hook into this great sea; and so they hide in the rocks of humility, high crags from which they can look out, and in which they need have no fear of the devil's nets.

They swim in a group, a fine symbol of spiritual unity; and they have a definite leader, thus indicating obedience. The leader is the superior, whom we are all bound to follow and obey, so as to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Grant us this, Lord Jesus Christ, to who be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(The theme for preaching on humility: *When thou art invited*.)**

13. There follows, thirdly,

*When thou art invited to a wedding, sit not down in the first place, lest perhaps one more honourable than thou be invited by him; and he that invited thee and him come and say to thee: Give this man place. And then thou begin with shame to take the lowest place*. [Lk 14.8-9]

The Gloss says: "When by the grace of faith you are called by the preacher, and join yourself to the members of the Church, do not boast about your own merits as if you were better than the rest." In this third part the Lord touches on two things, namely pride, when he says:

*They love the first chairs in the synagogues;* [Mt 23.6]

and humility, when he says:

*Sit down in the lowest place*.

There is great pride in wanting to sit down in the first place at the wedding (the Church of Jesus Christ), in a position of honour. That is why the Lord says, They love the first chairs in the synagogues, disdaining second place. "Unhappy ambition, knowing not how to achieve true greatness!" " The keen scout," says St Bernard[4] , "goes round, crawling on hands and knees, to see if he can gain into the inheritance of the Crucified; and the wretched man does not know that it is bought with blood!" *Flesh with blood thou shalt not eat* [Gen 9.4], says Genesis. Eating flesh with blood is mis-spending the inheritance of the Crucified on oneself by living carnally. His soul is lost to God’s people. So do not sit down in the first place, because the Lord says in Amos:

*I detest the pride of Jacob and I hate his houses*. [Am 6.8]

They sacrifice to idols on the high places, whereas the Lord was conceived in the humble place of Nazareth; in Jerusalem he was crucified on a hill. Do not sit down in the first place. St Gregory[5] says: "You can never learn humility on a peak, if you do not leave off from pride when you are entrusted with little things." You who love the peak of dignity, you are looking for the death of your soul, the loss of your good name, and peril for your body. The higher the step, the harder the fall. What madness, to run into such danger! Do not sit down in the first place, because afterwards you will begin with shame to take the lowest- in hell!

**(On the sin of simony: *Alcimus, who gave money*.)**

14. There is a **concordance** to this in the first Book of Maccabees, where it tells how Alcimus, who is said to have given money to buy the honour of the chief priesthood [cf. 1Mac 7.21]

*was struck; and his mouth was stopped and he was taken with a palsy, so that he could no more speak a word nor give order concerning his house. And he died at that time in great torment*. [1Mac 9.55-56]

Alcimus means 'yeast of bad counsel', and he represents the simoniac who corrupts those selling the doves which are souls with the yeast of money. Let not my soul come into their counsel, because it is the counsel of the wicked. He who wants to sit down in the place of ecclesiastical dignity, not called by God as Aaron was, will be like the palsied Alcimus, struck down with paralysis, dying unconfessed, intestate and in great torment; he will begin with shame to take the last and lowest place in hell, who wanted to appear first in importance. Go, sit in the lowest place, brother, and you will deserve to hear: Friend, go up higher. The Philosopher[6] says, "Attend to little things, so that you do not fall"; for as Solomon says in Proverbs: *He that maketh his house high, seeketh a downfall* [Prov 17.16]. That is why *Abraham dwelt in tents with Isaac* [Heb 11.3]. *Go and sit in the lowest place*.

The lowest place is the remembrance of death; he who sits in the first place has no desire for it. St Jerome[7] says, "He who always thinks that he is going to die, easily despises everything." In this lowest place, brother, take your place. Sit down there, beholding afar off, and saluting, the heavenly Jerusalem whose builder and maker is God, and confessing yourself a pilgrim and stranger upon earth [cf. Heb 11.10,13]. This is how to sit down in the lowest place: set yourself above no-one, think yourself lower than aothers, and so you will hear: *Friend, go up higher*. "From humility, he will recognise you as a friend, who from pride would put you down"[8] . Your friend is the keeper of your soul, and humility is the keeper of the virtues. He who has it keeps his soul, so that it does not escape him, nothing being more fleeting. *With all watchfulness keep thy heart* [Prov 4.23]. Do you want to be a friend of God? Keep your heart, or mind; for if it escapes, your soul will pay for it. *Every one that humbleth himself shall be exalted*

**(To religious, on keeping their heart: *One of the prophets cried to the king*.)**

15. It says in the Third Book of Kings that:

*One of the prophets cried to the king, and said: Thy servant went out to fight. And when a certain man was run away, one brought him to me, and said: Keep this man; and if he shall slip away, thy life shall be for his life, or thou shalt pay a talent of silver. And whilst I in a hurry turned this way and that, on a sudden he was not to be seen. And the king of Israel said to him: This is thy judgement, which thyself hath decreed*. [3(1)Kg 20.39-40]

Whoever of us has come into religious life, has come out to fight against the evil spirits. In this fight, 'one man' (our soul) runs away from us; but God's grace brings our soul back to us, when he makes us return to him, and to each of us he says: Keep this man. We keep by caring, we care with our heart. So keep this man: care for him, lest he lose his manhood and run away, prostituting himself and following his lovers. If he shall slip away, thy life shall be for his life. See what the Lord threatens. Note the words, 'slip

away'. "How suddenly it slips, that was born so long ago!".[9] *I saw that the people slipt from me* [1Kg(Sm) 13.11], said Saul. *My life is fallen into the pit*, said Jeremiah [Lam 3.53]. Alas! How many times my soul, the source of my life, falls into *into the pit of misery and the mire of dregs* [Ps 39.3]. Will my soul pay for my soul, my life; or shall I pay a talent of silver? Alas, Lord God! I have a soul, but I cannot weigh a talent of silver, purity of life, in the scales of your judgement. So do not weigh my soul against that which has slipped away! Truly, Lord, your judgements are just, and I deserve to be hanged, because I have not kept my heart, my life, which you have entrusted to me; and I deserve to lose my life.

*Whilst I in a hurry turned this way and that, on a sudden he was not to be seen*. See how the soul slips away! Take note: *I was in a hurry, and I turned this way and that*. In a hurry, because involved in earthly concerns. No wonder your soul slips away, when you are hurried by such preoccupations! Do you want to keep your soul? Stay tranquil in mind; and attend to what is meant by 'this way and that'. This way to the flesh, that way to the world you turn, and lose your soul. You must not turn to right or left, but walk the king's highway, to have yourself always in sight. Do not judge your life or morality by this man or that; let no-one lead you astray. *Suddenly, he was gone!* Wherever you turn (if not towards God or towards yourself), suddenly your soul will be gone. So do not turn yourself, have your face set towards Jerusalem, to go up upon your heart. Keep it, and you will be God's friend. So God says, *Go up higher*. He who sits in the lowest place, goes up higher, because he who humbles himself will be exalted*. Then thou shalt have glory before them that sit at table with thee* [Lk 14. 10,11]. Luke says:

*He will make them sit down, and passing will minister unto them*. [Lk 12.37]

How great a glory, when the Lord ministers to his servant.

16. The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this clause:

*One Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all*. [Eph 4.5-6]

If you sit down in the lowest place of humility, you will fear the Lord, hold the faith, and keep your baptismal innocence. There are five things mentioned in this part: Lord, God, Father, faith and Baptism. Whoever wants to hear, Friend, go up higher, should pay heed to the Lord's power, God's wisdom, the Father's mercy, the excellence of faith and the virtue of Baptism. Let him pay head to the power, so as to fear; to the wisdom, so as to be wise; to the mercy, so as to trust; to the excellence of faith, so as to despise temporal things; and to the virtue of Baptism, so as to stand strong in war.

Let us ask the Lord Jesus Christ, then, beloved brothers, to make us sit down in the lowest place, keep our soul, and go up to sit with him in the kingdom of glory. May he grant this, who is above all and throughout all, God blessed in all for ever and ever. Let every humble soul say, Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] BERNARD, *De diversis, sermon* 42,3; PL 183.662

[2] cf. P. COMESTOR, *Historia Scholastica, Lib. Exodi*, 10; PL 198.1147

[3] OVID, *De arte amandi*, I,729

[4] cf. GAUFRIDUS, *Declamationes*, 13,14; PL 184.445

[5] GREGORY, *Regula pastoralis*, I,10; PL 77.22

[6] cf. SENECA, *Epistola* 20: *Redige te ad parva, ex quibus cadere non possis*

[7] JEROME, *Epistola* 53,10 *ad Paulinum*; PL 22.549

[8] GREGORY, *In Evangeliis, hom* 27,4; PL 76.1207

[9] CATO, *Dicta*, II,17,2

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost*: The Pharisees being gathered together, Jesus asked them*, etc.; which is divided into two clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon on the Lord's Nativity, and on the four seasons of the year, and of the three characteristics of the sun, and the three of the earth and of fire, and their meaning: *When the time came that the sun shone out*.)**

1. At that time: *The Pharisees being gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying: What think you of Christ? Whose son is he? They say to him: David's*. [Mt.22.41-42]

The second Book of Maccabees says that

*When the time came that the sun shone out, which was before in cloud,*

*there was a great fire kindled, so that all wondered*. [2Mac 1.22]

There are four times, or seasons, of the year: winter, spring, summer and autumn. Winter consumes, spring sows and plants, summer reaps and threshes, and autumn gathers the vintage. There was winter from Adam to Moses, during which time everything was consumed. As the Apostle says:

*Death reigned from Adam unto Moses*. [Rom 5.14]

There was spring from Moses to Christ, when the law was sown and planted, and there were only flowers that promised fruit to come. Summer was the Incarnation of Christ, at which time the sun himself, formerly in the cloud of the Father's bosom, shone upon us. This was the time of reaping and threshing, as he said in John:

*Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and see the countries; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit unto life everlasting*. [Jn 4.35-36]

Then shall be the autumn, when the grape-skins are thrown on the dung-heap of hell,

and the clear wine rests in the cellar of the heavenly kingdom. But the trial of threshing must come first, because it is through the chalice that we come to glory. *When the fulness of time was come*, [Gal 4.4] the sun shone out on those in the land and shadow of death, which was before in cloud, hidden from us, and there was a great fire kindled. He himself said:

*I am come to cast fire on the earth; and what will I, but that it be kindled?* [Lk 12.49]

It is on earth, be it noted, and nowhere else, that he says he will cast fire; and rightly, because he came to cure by applying contraries.

There are three things in fire: heat, brightness, and lightness. Earth has the three opposite characteristics: cold, darkness and heaviness. The fire is the love of God, having the heat of humility, the brightness of chastity and the lightness of poverty. Earthly things are cold with pride, dark with lust, and heavy with avarice. He came, then, to cast fire on the earth, opposing the heat of humility to the cold and ice of pride; as the Psalm says: *He shall send out his word*, that is:

*Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart*. [Mt 11.29]

*and shall melt them* [Ps 147.18], the hearts of the proud. He opposes the brightness of chastity to the darkness of lust, as Acts says:

*An angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shined in the room of the prison; and he, striking Peter on the side, raised him up, saying: Arise quickly. And the chains fell off from his hands*. [Acts 12.7]

The angel, virginal in nature, stands for the grace of chastity, whose light shines in the prison cell, the heart of the sinner blinded by lust. How it imprisons us on every side! The lustful man hides from himself whatever will quench lust, but when the angel strikes his side with the lance of fear, to release the moisture of lust from him, he wakes him from the sleep of death and bids him rise by contrition, quickly in confession, and then the chains of bad habit fall from his hands, his works.

He opposes the weight of avarice with the lightness of poverty. *If thou wilt be perfect, go sell*, etc. [Mt 19.21], and, as Jeremiah says: *A swift runner pursuing his course* [Jer 2.23]. The swift runner is the poor in spirit, running like a giant of two-fold substance[1] . What a weight he frees himself from, when he loves to have nothing, and pursues his course! Wisdom speaks in Proverbs:

*I will shew thee the way of wisdom: I will lead thee by the paths of equity* (that is, of poverty), *which when thou shalt have entered, thy steps* (affections) *shall not be straitened: and when thou runnest thou shalt not meet a stumbling block*. [Prov 4.11-12]

Well said, then: *I am come to cast fire on the earth*. When the Lord does this, it is truly marvellous in our eyes! So we say again, When the time came that the sun shone out, which was before in cloud, there was a great fire kindled, so that all wondered. It is of this sun, Jesus Christ, that today's Gospel asks: *What think you of Christ? Whose son is he?*

2. There are two clauses in today's Gospel. The first treats of the love of God and of neighbour, and we will not deal with it here, because it has already been explained in the Gospel*: Blessed are the eyes that see what you see* [Pentecost XIII]. The second treats of Christ, and we would like to offer some thoughts on this.

In the Introit of today's Mass we sing: *I am the salvation of the people*. The Epistle is taken from that of the blessed Apostle Paul to the Corinthians: *I give thanks to my God always for you*, which goes with this Gospel because both speak of Christ in a special and particular way.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

3. Let us say, then:

*The Pharisees being gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying: What think you of Christ? Whose son is he? They say to him: David's. He saith to them: How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying: The Lord said to my Lord...* [Mt 22.41-44]

In this clause is contained the summit of our faith, our belief that the Lord Jesus Christ is true God and true man, sitting at the right hand of the Father. We confess him as Lord and as son of David: Lord, who made everything, including David; whose son he is by descent according to the flesh. The Jews are not reproved for calling him son of David, but for not believing him to be son of God. The Son himself says to them: How is it that David, speaking in the Holy Spirit, not in his own heart, calls him 'Lord'? He says, *The Lord* (that is, the Father) *said to my Lord* (that is, the Son). The Gloss explains, "This implies the generation of a son equal to himself. He is not Lord in virtue of being born from him, but in virtue being always from the Father." Sit on my right, that is in those good things that are to be preferred, while (or until) I make your enemies, the disobedient, a footstool for your feet, subjecting them whether they will or no.

That it is the Father who subjects the enemies betokens the Son's unity of nature, not his weakness; for the Son also subjects enemies to the Father, by glorifying the Father upon the earth. If David calls him Lord, how is he his son? In other words, you think of the Christ to come as a mere man; so that in David's lifetime the Christ did not yet exist, nor was he David's Lord. Did David lie, then? We speak rather of fathers being, and being called, lords to their sons, not sons to their fathers. Let us reject the unbelief of the Jews, and confess with Peter: *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God* [Mt 16.16], who *went forth with his Christ for the salvation of his people*, as Habakkuk says [cf. Hab 3.13].

4. So Christ himself says in the Introit of today's Mass, *I am the salvation of the people. From whatever trouble they cry to me, I will hear them, and I will be their Lord for ever*. How well the Introit of the Mass is **concordant** with the story of the Maccabees, which shows clearly how the Lord was the saviour of his people, and heard and helped them in all their troubles. Note the words: '*Saviour of the people*', '*I will hear them*' and '*I will be their Lord*.'

There are three **concordances** to this in today's Epistle. The first is when the Apostle says:

*I give thanks to my God for you in the grace of God, which is given you in Christ Jesus*, [1Cor 1.4] who says, *I am the Saviour of the people*, who by grace alone saved his people from their sins.

The second is when he adds: *That in all things you are made rich in him, in all utterance and in all knowledge*. [1Cor 1.5]; this is: *From whatever trouble they cry to me, I will hear them*. Note 'trouble', 'cry' and 'hear'. If from 'trouble' (from a troubled and contrite heart) they 'cry' (in confession), he will 'hear' (by granting forgiveness). So 'in all utterance' of every kind of confession, and 'in all knowledge' of full satisfaction, you are made rich in him, because you are poor and humble in in yourselves. The soul's riches are remission of sins and bestowal of grace.

The third is: *Waiting for the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who also will confirm you unto the end*. This is: *and I will be their Lord for ever*.

So, dearest brothers, let us ask that Lord Jesus, in whose hand, nailed to the Cross, is our salvation, to save us from the assault of the enemy, to hear us by bestowing remission of sins, and to strengthen us to the end, so that we may attain to him, the Lord, who is seated at the right hand of the Father. May he grant this, who is blessed. Amen.

**(A moral sermon for religious on the ornament of virtue, on the nature and properties of balsam, where it comes from and what it is like; and on how honey is corrupted by a spider, and what all these things, and others connected with them, mean.)**

5. *What think you of Christ? Whose son is he? They say to him: David's*.

The Book of Maccabees says:

*And they adorned the front of the temple with crowns of gold...*

*and they dedicated an altar to the Lord*. [1Mac 4.57]

Let us see what is meant by the temple, its front, the golden crown, the altar and its dedication. A 'temple' suggests 'contemplation', or perhaps an 'ample' roof. The Apostle says:

*The temple of God is holy, which you are*. [1Cor 3.17]

We are the temple of God, and holy, if we contemplate, and if we are amply roofed. We are contemplatives with respect to God, renouncing temporal things. The Apostle speaks of us contemplating *not the things that are seen, but the things that are not seen* [2Cor 4.18]. We are 'roofed' as to ourselves, by mortifying the flesh. It says in Matthew: *He that is on the housetop, let him not come down to take anything out of his house* [Mt 24.17]. The Gloss says: "He who goes beyond the flesh, should not return in mind to any of his former behaviour." That is, he should not lean down towards the flesh by any affection. We should be 'ample' towards our neighbour, by compassion for him. 'Ample' suggests more all round. You should expend more on contemplation of God and compassion for your neighbour, than on your own flesh. If that is the sort of temple you are, you will truly be holy. Thus, *they adorned the front of the temple*.

The 'front' is that which is most known to us. It signifies our works, of which the Lord says: *By their fruits ye shall know them* [Mt 7.16]. The golden crown on the front of the temple is the pure intention of our work. Let us adorn our works with the golden crown of a pure intention, like true Maccabees; not with stibic stone like the harlot Jezebel, who *painted her eyes with stibic stone, and adorned her head, and looked out of a window*, as the fourth book of Kings says [4(2)Kg 9.30]. Jezebel is said to mean 'dunghill', a place full of dung, smeared and defiled with dung. She represents the hypocrite, smeared with the dung of vainglory, where dying flies gather when they can find no sweet ointment. Stibic is white lead, or of a blue colour, and women paint their eyelids with it. It represents popular praise, with which the hypocrite paints his eyes. When he is praised by people, his eyes laugh, his face smiles. He adorns his head, when he praises his own good points, and he looks out of the window both to see and to be seen. "They come to gaze; they come to be gazed on"[2] . I pray you, adorn the temple with golden crowns, not with stibic stone!

*And they dedicated an altar to the Lord*. To dedicate is to give to God. The altar, the 'high altar', is our heart, which should be raised up by love, and an altar by our contrition; and so we should dedicate it, give it to God, who says in Proverbs*, My son, give me thy heart* [Prov 23.26]. Whoever gives God his heart is a true 'Christ', anointed with grace, and the son of David. Thus it is said in today's Gospel: What think you of Christ? Whose son is he? They say to him: David's. We would like to say something of a moral nature on these two words, Christ and David.

6. The word 'Christ' is derived from 'chrism', which is made from oil and balsam. Balsam is a vine-like tree, supported like a vine. It stands two cubits high, and is distinguished by its evergreen foliage. It is cut with glass or with bone knives, because the touch of iron harms it, and it quickly dies. It secretes drops of beautiful perfume. Its finest features are these 'tears', secondly its seed, thirdly its bark, and lastly its wood. It preserves youth,

and prevents decay. If its drop is mixed with honey, it is spoiled, but it is proved to be without honey if it is congealed with milk. When the sun is shining bright, it cannot be held in the hand. Let us dwell on each of these characteristics, and say something about them.

The balsam tree is the life of the just man, which should resemble the vine, and be supported in the same way. A vine is dug round, pruned, and supported with stakes. The just man should likewise be dug round with the hoe of contrition, pruned with the knife of confession, and sustained by the stakes of satisfaction. The first is in Luke: *Leave it this year, and I will dig round it, and apply dung* [cf. Lk 13.8]. The second is in Canticles: *The time of pruning is here; the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land* (the penitent's confession) [Cant 2.12]. The stakes (which are small ones) represent the humility of satisfaction, with which the life of the just is upheld, as the Lord says in Isaiah: *I shall fasten him as a stake in the place of the faithful* [Is 22.23]. The stake is fixed in the place of the faithful, when the life of the just man is kept in humility, in Holy Church.

It stands two cubits high. These two cubits are the two precepts of charity, whereby the just man is raised above earthly things. Of the first cubit, the love of God, the Lord says to Noah in Genesis:

*Thou shalt make a window in the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish the top of it*. [Gen 6.16]

An ark conceals from a thief, or from sight; it is the life of the just, who hides himself from every sin. The window, which looks on the outside, is devotion of mind, through which the dove which is the soul goes in and out. It goes out to contemplate God, it goes in to consider itself. The window in the ark is therefore devotion in the life of the just, which is topped in a cubit, the love of God. *Blessed are those who die in the Lord*, says John in the Apocalypse [Apoc 14.3], and *Stephen fell asleep in the Lord* [Acts 7.60]. Regarding the second cubit, love of neighbour, Moses gave this command, to dig a trench of one cubit round the altar [cf. Ezek 43.13]. The trench of one cubit around the altar represents compassion for his neighbour in the mind of the just.

It is distinguished by its evergreen foliage., representing the perseverance of the just; of which Job says:

*At the scent of water a tree shall spring, and bring forth leaves.*[Job 14.7,9]

Scent is of the air; what is it but an attractive air? The 'scent' is the infusion of grace, and when you draw it in you send forth the shoot of good work, and so make the foliage of perseverance.

It is cut by glass or by bone knives, because iron is harmful to it, and it quickly dies. Glass represents the transparency of eternal life, as John says in the Apocalypse*: The city was of pure gold, like to clear glass* [Apoc 21.18]. In a glass, whatever liquid it

contains is seen from outside. In gold and glass we understand the company of the saints in their heavenly home, shining with the glory of blessedness, and which grossness of body does not hide from the eyes of another. To those who gaze on God's glory, nothing which happens in God's creation is invisible. The 'bones' represent the examples of the saints, which support our frailty as bones support the flesh. The balsam tree, then, is cut by glass or bone knives when the life or mind of the just is opened to compunction by desire for heavenly glory, or by the example of the saints. But if it is cut by iron (mortal sin), it dies at once, because *the soul that sins shall surely die* [Ezek 18.4,20].

It secretes drops of beautiful perfume. It is extremely beautiful; and it represents the sweet influence of a holy life. The Apostle says that we are *the good odour of Christ to God in every place* [cf. 2Cor 2.14], and Ecclesiasticus says: *My odour is as the purest balm* [Ecclus 24.21]. The odour of the hypocrite is impure, corrupt, because while holiness appears outwardly, wickedness hides within. The odour of the just is pure, because the purity of his conscience is concordant with the odour of his reputation. Its finest features are these 'tears', secondly its seed, thirdly its bark, and lastly its wood. Note these four: the 'tear' of balsam is the sweetness of contemplation; its seed is the word of preaching; its bark is the roughness of penance; its wood is this mortal body. Of the first, the book of Judges says that Axa, sitting upon her ass, wept for the water above [cf. Jg 1.14-15]. This comes about when the soul, restraining the flesh, looks towards the sweetness of contemplation with devout desire. Of the second, Luke says that *the sower went out to sow his seed* [Lk 8.5]. Of the third, we know that bark covers the outside, as the roughness of penance covers our sins. Blessed are those whose sins are covered [Ps 31.1]. Of the fourth, Job says:

*A tree hath hope. If it be cut, it groweth green again*. [Job 14.7]

Just so a man has, and should have, hope that his 'wood' (his body) after being cut down by the pruning of death, will flourish again in the general resurrection. Little thanks, and almost no care, is due to this wood, as to a useless servant; but great thanks are due to the bark of penance, because it is greatly effective. To the seed of preaching still more is due, because by it we get to the bark; but most of all, and in the first place, thanks are due for the tear of contemplation, which has in itself the greatest and best sweetness.

It preserves youth. The sweetness of the contemplative life keeps the soul in the youthfulness of grace: *You will renew your youth like the eagle* [Ps 102.5]. It prevents decay. The mind anointed with that sweetness is kept uncorrupted by consent to sin. On the contrary, however, as the Lord says by Jeremiah:

*I will make the pride of Juda and the great pride of Jerusalem to rot*. [Jer 13.9]

This refers to clergy and laity. If its drop is mixed with honey, it is spoiled, but it is proved to be without honey if it is congealed with milk. Anyone who mixes it with the honey of

temporal things, adulterates the sweetness of contemplation.

7. Natural History tells that spiders reproduce in honey-comb, and corrupt what is in the comb. Little worms are produced in the hives of bees, and they get little wings and fly. The spider weaves its web in the air. The spider of poisonous pride reproduces in temporal delight, and it spreads its web in the air, as it walks in wonderful things above itself [cf. Ps 130.1]. The worms of gluttony and lust are produced, which make a man fly to the desire of what is not his. No wonder if with such a mixture the balm of contemplative life, or of pure conscience, is adulterated! Morals come from convictions. "One grape can develop mould at the sight of another."[3] You will prove yourself to be without the honey of transitory sweetness, if you are ‘coagulated’, set in the spirit of poverty by the admixture of the milk of the Lord’s Incarnation. "The bread of Angels has been made milk for little ones", says Saint Augustine,[4] so that the little ones are nourished by it.

When the sun is shining bright, it cannot be held in the hand. Balm in the hand is purity of conscience in work. When the burning sun of divine love enlightens and sets fire to the mind of the just man, and shows him what he is, every work and virtue fails. As Daniel says:

*I saw this great vision: and there remained no strength in me, and the appearance of my countenance was changed in me, and I fainted away and retained no strength*. [Dan 10.8]

When the sun of grace is joined to the balm of a pure conscience, there remains no confidence in one’s own works. This is the balm more precious than gold or topaz [cf. Ps 118.127]. If only the Queen of Sheba would come, and give us just a little root of balsam, so that we could plant a balsam vine for ourselves! Josephus[5] says that when the Queen of Sheba came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, she gave him a root of balsam, from which were propagated the balsam-vines in Engeddi.

8. And so from such balsam, mixed with the oil of mercy, the chrism is made to anoint the just man and make him a christ, and son of David, of whom is said: *What think you of Christ? Whose son is he? They say to him: David’s*. Truly, the just man anointed with chrism made of oil and balsam is the son of David. David means ‘strong of hand’, or ‘desirable to behold’. A boxer about to fight an opponent anoints his head; and in the same way the just man is anointed with balsam and oil so that he may become strong in hand, and cast down his enemy the devil; then he will be son of David (strength) here and now, and son of glory hereafter, desirable to behold because he will see face to face him *on whom the angels desire to gaze* [cf. 1Pt 1.12].

May Jesus Christ himself, the son of David, lead us to the glory of this beauty; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] cf. DIVINE OFFICE, Advent Hymn, Lauds.

[2] OVID, *Ars amatoria*, I,99: *Spectatum veniunt, veniunt spectentur it ipsae*

[3] JUVENAL, Satires II,81

[4] cf. AUGUSTINE, *Enarratio in Ps*. 130.9; PL 37.1710

[5] cf. P. COMESTOR, *Historia Scholastica, lib. III Regum*, 26; PL 198.1370

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost: *Jesus, going up into a boat*; which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon on the prerogative of spiritual grace, which the Lord bestows on the preacher, and on his holy way of life: *The young Antiochus*.)**

1. At that time*: Jesus, going up into a boat, passed over the water and came into his own city*. [Mt.9.1]

It says in the Book of Maccabees that

*The young Antiochus... gave Jonathan... leave to drink in gold and to be clothed in purple and to wear a golden buckle.* [1Mac 11.57-58]

Let us see what is meant by Antiochus, Jonathan, gold, purple and the gold buckle.

Antiochus means 'silent poor man', and in this place he stands for Jesus Christ, who was a silent poor man. Note both words: he was a poor man, having nowhere to lay his head [cf. Mt 8.20], except the place where, *bowing his head, he gave up the ghost* [Jn 19.30]. He was silent, led like a lamb to the slaughter, and not opening his mouth when he was ill-treated [cf. Is 53.7]. So Jeremiah says:

*Neither evil nor good shall proceed out of the mouth of the Highest*. [Lam 3.38]

Jonathan means 'the gift of a dove', and he stands for the preacher, who receives the gift of a dove (the Holy Spirit), so as to invite sinners to the dove-like sighings of penitence. This, in the first book of Kings, Jonathan said to David:

*If I shall say to the boy: Behold, the arrows are on this side of thee, take them up; come thou to me, because thee is peace to thee, and there is no evil, as the Lord liveth! but if I shall speak thus to the boy: Behold, the arrows are beyond thee; go in peace, for the Lord hath sent thee away*. [1Kg(Sm) 20.22]

There are three arrows: the soul's fear of separation from God, the sorrow of confession, and the fervour of love. These arrows are shot from the bow of the preacher, and wound the soul so that it sighs and mourns. But if these arrows are 'beyond the boy', beyond a child's reason, there is no safety for David; if they are in front of him, so that he can see the arrows, there is salvation for David and nothing evil: *The Lord lives!*

So Christ gives to this Jonathan leave to drink in gold, to be clothed in purple and to wear a golden buckle. Gold means the brightness of wisdom, purple the blood of the Lord's Passion, and the gold buckle the bridling of his own will. Blessed is that preacher who is given leave to drink in gold! Nowadays, many have leave to own gold, but not to drink in gold. He drinks in gold, when he first draws from the bright wisdom he has received, and then gives it to others; as Rebecca said to Abraham's servant, in Genesis:

*Drink, sir, and I will give thy camels drink also*. [Gen 24.14]

This is what Wisdom says to the preacher: "Drink, sir." She calls him 'sir', or 'Lord', because his power comes from Jesus Christ. As Genesis says:

*Thou shalt be under thy husband's power, and he shall have dominion over thee*. [Gen 3.16]

Happy is he who is master of the wisdom given him! He is master of wisdom if he attributes it to God, not to himself, and lives according to what he preaches. Drink, sir, and I will give thy camels (your hearers) drink also.

This is what the Lord says in John:

*Draw out now, and carry to the chief steward of the feast*. [Jn 2.8]

The chief steward is the one who arranges the seating, where each one sits to eat. There are three couches in the Church, three orders in which the Lord as it were rests. They are married people, continents and virgins. The prelate or preacher is chief steward of these, and so he should first taste the drink, and afterwards serve it to those who are seated. So, *The young Antiochus... gave Jonathan... leave to drink in gold*.

*And to be clothed in purple*. That preacher is clothed in purple who, like the great preacher Paul, bears in his body the marks of Jesus [cf. Gal 6.17]. So it says in Canticles:

*The purple of the king is bound in the channels.* [Cant 7.5]

The hollowed out channels stand for humility of heart. Thus the purple of the King (the Passion of Jesus Christ) is bound in the channels of humble preachers, through whom the water of doctrine flows, to water the gardens of spices, the souls of the faithful. There should be nothing standing between the preacher's life and Christ's Passion, as the

Apostle says:

*The world is crucified to me, and I to the world.* [Gal 6.14]

*And to wear a golden buckle*. The buckle that fastens represents the fastening of our own will. It is aptly called ‘golden’, because from it comes purity of soul and body. The preacher should be bound with this buckle, so as to be able to say with the Apostle (in the second Epistle to Timothy):

*I labour in the gospel even unto bands... but the word of God is not bound*. [2Tim 2.9]

When the preacher’s self-will is bound, the word of God is set free in his mouth, so run freely to the hearts of the hearers. If, then, the prelate or preacher of the Church drinks in the gold of wisdom, and is clothed in the purple of the Lord’s Passion, and binds his self-will with the golden buckle, he can truly go up into the boat with Jesus, cross the sea and come to his own city; whence today’s Gospel says, *Jesus, going up into the boat*, etc.

2. There are three things to note in this Gospel: first, the going up of Jesus into the boat: *Jesus, going up into the boat*; second, the bringing of the paralytic: *And behold, they brought him*; thirdly, the cure of the paralysed man: *Arise, take up thy bed*, etc.

In the Introit of today’s Mass we sing: *All that thou hast done, O Lord*. The Epistle is from blessed Paul to the Ephesians: *Be renewed in the spirit of your mind*, which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the three clauses of the Gospel. The first is: *Be renewed*; the second: *Putting away lying*; the third: *He that stole*. Note that the cure of the paralysed man, the renewal of the mind, and the putting away of lying, mean the same thing; and that is why this Epistle is read with this Gospel.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(On the Cross of Christ: *Jesus, going up into a boat*.)**

3. Let us say, then:

*Jesus, going up into a boat, passed over the water and came into his own city*.

Allegorically: the boat is the Cross, on which Jesus Christ ‘went up’; as he said:

*If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to myself*- [Jn 12.32]

with the hook of the Cross. Of this, it says in the prophet Amos:

*What seest thou, Amos? And I said; A hook to draw down fruit.*

*And the Lord said to me: The end is come upon my people Israel;*

*I will not again pass them by any more*. [Am 8.2]

Fruits have three things: taste, colour and smell. The fruits are just men, in whom is the savour of contemplation, the colour of holiness and the scent of good repute. The Lord draws these fruits to himself every day, with the hook of his Cross. When he went up on it, an end came upon us, because our misery was ended. He will not pass us by, but rather take us with him to glory. This is: He passed over the water and came into his own city. John says that Jesus knew *when his hour had come, for him to pass from this world to the Father* [Jn 13.1]. This is what the Psalmist means by*: He will drink from the brook by the wayside*, etc. [Ps 109.7]. He drinks from the brook of the Passion, in the way of his pilgrimage, and therefore he has lifted up his head, which he formerly inclined upon the Cross when he gave up his spirit.

**(On his going down: *Come down*.)**

4. Morally: let us take note, and see what is meant by these four words, ‘going up into’, ‘boat’, ‘passed over’ and ‘city’. To go up, one must first come down. So the Apostle says of Christ:

*That he ascended, what is it, but because he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?* [Eph 4.9]

The prophet Isaiah shows you how you should descend:

*Come down, sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon*. [Is 47.1]

Note each word: O sinful soul, called ‘virgin’ because you are barren of good works, ‘daughter’ because of your weakness, and ‘Babylon’ because of the confusion of sin, come down from your haughtiness of heart, and by humility sit in the dust and consider your worthlessness. These are ‘the lower parts of the earth’, and if you first go down and consider them, afterwards you will be able to go up. Genesis tells how Abraham went up from Egypt, with all that he had, into the south [cf. Gen 13.1]. In the same book we read:

*Jacob having called together all his household, said: Arise, and let us go up to Bethel*. [Gen 35.2,3]

Abraham and Jacob stand for the penitent, who goes up from Egypt, the darkness of our misery, with all his household, the thoughts and affections of his mind, none of which should remain in Egypt. You should go up entirely into the south, contrition of mind, or Bethel, the house of God, where he dwells. So Isaiah says:

*The High and the Eminent that habiteth eternity... dwells with a contrite and humble*

*spirit*. [Is 57.15]

(See the Gospel: *Jesus was led into the desert* [Lent I]]

**(On the going up and renewal of the soul: *Let us go up now to cleanse the holy places*.)**

5. There is a **concordance** to this in the first book of Maccabees, where Judas Maccabaeus says:

*Let us go up now to cleanse the holy places and to repair them. And all the army assembled together; and they went up into mount Sion. And they saw the sanctuary desolate, and the altar profaned, and the gates burnt, and shrubs growing up in the courts as in a forest or on the mountains, and the chambers joining to the temple thrown down. And they rent their garments and made great lamentation and put ashes on their heads. And they fell down to the ground on their faces*. [1Mac 4.36-40]

This passage contains how the soul is ruined, and how it is rebuilt. Judas, the penitent, having gathered all his army, his thoughts and affections, must go up into mount Sion, the watchtower of his mind. >From there he can look out over the east of his birth, the west of his death, the north of adversity and the south of worldly prosperity: first, to humble himself; secondly, to weep for himself; thirdly, to become strong; and fourthly, lest he grow proud.

Man recognises the good he has lost, when he first sees aright the evil he has done. So there follows: And they saw the sanctuary desolate, etc. The sanctuary is desolate when the soul, sanctified by the water of Baptism, sins mortally and is deserted by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The altar is profaned when faith is destroyed. The gates are burnt when the bodily senses are laid waste by the fire of concupiscence. Shrubs grow up in the courts when a multitude of superfluous thoughts arise in the heart. The ‘chambers’ were the rooms the Levites slept in, in the courts of the house of the Lord, which are mentioned in the last vision of Ezekiel [cf. Ezek 40.45-46]. They are thrown down, when the secret places of the mind are riven by unlawful desires. See, then, how the soul is ruined; but let us see how it is rebuilt.

*They rent their garments*, etc. Note, ‘they rent’, ‘they lamented’, ‘they put on ashes’ and ‘they fell down’. The rending of garments is contrition of heart; the lamentation is tearful confession; the imposition of ashes on the head is humble satisfaction; and falling on one’s face on the ground is the remembrance of one’s final destiny. The first man was told: "You are earth, and you will return to the earth." Those who go up with Judas to cleans and restore the holy places, truly go up with Jesus into the boat.

**(On the four things necessary for sailing a ship, and their meaning: "*Note that for sailing*.")**

6. For sailing a ship, at least four things are needed: a mast, a sail, oars and an anchor. The mast is contrition of heart, the sail is oral confession (because confession must be attached to contrition, as the sail is to the mast), the oars are works of satisfaction (fasting, prayer and alms-deeds), and the anchor is the remembrance of death. Just as the anchor holds back the ship from foundering on the rocks, so the memory of death restrains our life, so that it is not wrecked by sins. Solomon says:

*Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin*. [Ecclus 7.40]

Whoever wants to cross from this mortal shore to the shore of immortality, and reach the heavenly city of Jerusalem, must go up into this boat of penitence.

The first part of the Epistle is **concordant** with this first clause:

*And be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth.* [Eph 4.23-24]

This is how mount Sion is cleansed and rebuilt. Judas went up to cleanse and renew the holy places, and the Apostle tells us to be renewed in the spirit of our minds by contrition of heart; to put on the new man in oral confession; who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth by works of satisfaction. So you will go up into the boat and come to the city of heavenly glory. May he lead us there, who went up into the boat of the Cross, and on the third day rose again as a new man; to him be honour and glory for ages unending. Amen.

[THE SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A theme on the five ways in which illnesses happen: *They brought to him a paralytic*.)**

7. There follows, secondly:

*And, behold, they brought to him one sick of the palsy lying in a bed. And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the man sick of the palsy: Be of good heart, son. Thy sins are forgiven thee*. [Mt 9.2]

As the Gloss says, sometimes illness is a result of sins, and so they must be forgiven first, so that health may be restored. Illnesses happen in five ways: first, so that the just may increase their merits by patience, like Job; or to preserve their virtue, lest pride tempt them, like Paul; or to correct their sins, as the leprosy to Mary, Moses' sister, and like this paralytic; or for God's glory, as with the man born blind, and Lazarus; or as a beginning of eternal punishment, as with Herod, that he might see here what would follow in hell. So Jeremiah says, *With a double destruction destroy them, Lord* [Jer 17.18]. Let us see what is meant by the paralytic, the bed, and those who brought him,

from a moral point of view.

Paralysis, properly so called, affects the middle part of the body; if it affects every part, we call it apoplexy. A better approach is to call it a seizure of the body, caused by a great freezing either of the whole body or of a part. Paralysis is a loss of control of the members, and it represents the pleasure of the flesh, which is like a bed on which the paralytic, the soul, lies helpless. Jeremiah says, *How long wilt thou be dissolute in delights, O wandering daughter?* [Jer 31.22]. When the flesh loses control in pleasure, the soul lies helpless, like one paralysed, in feebleness.

**(The theme for a sermon against carnal delights: *I have woven my bed with cords*..)**

8. Of this bed, the harlot says in the Proverbs of Solomon:

*I have woven my bed with cords; I have covered it with tapestry, brought from Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let us be inebriated with the breasts, and let us enjoy the desired embraces, till the day appear*. [Prov 7.16-18]

The bed of carnal pleasure is woven with the cords of sin. It is covered with tapestries of varied delights, brought from the Egypt of a darkened conscience. Because mirth is mixed with sorrow, and pleasure with bitterness, there is added: I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Myrrh and aloes, which are bitter plants, represent the bitterness of punishment; the sweet-smelling cinnamon represents pleasure of the flesh. So the harlot (the flesh) says to the young man (the soul): *Come* (by the consent of the mind), *let us be inebriated with the breasts* (assenting to works of greed and lust), *and let us enjoy the desired embraces* (in the bondage of habit), *till the day appear*. This is appropriate, since the flesh cannot get round anyone except in the night of ignorance; so it fears nothing more greatly than the daylight of understanding. See, then, how the palsied man lies helpless on his bed.

Similarly, it says in Judith that Holofernes lay on his bed, fast asleep, being exceedingly drunk [Jdth 13.4]. Holofernes is the ‘weakening of the sacrificial calf’, meaning the spirit of the sinner which, weakened by the consent of the mind, weakens the sacrificial calf of the flesh with the fatness of temporal abundance, in the pleasure of which it lies asleep, being exceedingly drunk.

It says, too, in Proverbs:

*Thou shalt be as one sleeping in the midst of the sea,*

*and as a pilot fast asleep, when the stern is lost.*

*And thou shalt say: They have beaten me, but I was not sensible of pain;*

*they drew me, and I felt not.* [Prov 23.34-35]

Someone sleeps in the midst of the sea when he lies torpid amid his tossing thoughts and bitter sins, and he resembles a drowsy steersman who lets go of the rudder, the control of reason, and drives the ship of his life into the Charybdis of eternal death. He is not sensible of the beating of the demons, nor does he feel when they draw him by various vices, *as an ox led to be a victim* [Prov 7.22].

So the paralysed man lies on his bed, and of him Solomon says in Proverbs:

*The slothful man says: There is a lion in the way and a lioness in the roads.*

*He turneth as a door upon its hinges*. [Prov 26.13-14]

The lion is the devil, the lioness is carnal desire. He is slothful, his feet held fast, because greed and lust have weakened the feet of his good desires and will. He lies paralysed upon the bed of wretched pleasure, a sick man. He cannot find the energy to withstand the devil's temptation, he is afraid to restrain the desires of the flesh. He does not want to go out, to works of penance; and so he turns about in carnal pleasure, like a door on its hinge.

**(On the four who carry the paralysed man, and their meaning, and on the fourfold roof: *And behold they brought him*.)**

9. *And, behold, they brought him one sick of the palsy upon a bed.*

Mark tells it like this:

*And they came to him, bringing one sick of the palsy, who was carried by four. And, when they could not offer him for the multitude, they uncovered the roof, where he was; and opening it they let down the bed whereon the man sick of the palsy lay*. [Mk 2.3-4]

Humility and poverty, patience and obedience, are the four who bring the soul to Jesus, as it lies helpless in carnal pleasure. And because they cannot bring it because of the crowd of pressing desires of the flesh, they strip the roof and open it, and let down the bed with the palsied man in front of Jesus.

The roof is a fourfold one: of pride, avarice, stubbornness and anger, the leaky roof spoken of by Ecclesiasticus [Prov 19.13], blinding the eye of reason. Isaiah says: *What aileth thee also, that thou art wholly gone up to the housetops?* [Is 22.1]; and David*: Let them be as grass upon the tops of houses*, etc. [Ps 128.6]. This roof, covering and obscuring the face of the soul so that it cannot see the light of justice, the four virtues mentioned strip by contrition of heart, and open in oral confession; thus they let down before Jesus, trusting in Jesus' mercy, both soul and body in the satisfaction of penance.

No-one can come to Jesus, unless he is carried by these four virtues. As the Gloss says, "He is carried by four, who is lifted to God by four virtues, with a trusting mind. The Book of Wisdom says: She teaches sobriety and wisdom and justice and virtue [cf. Wisd 8.7] (which others call prudence, fortitude, temperance and justice)."

**(On faith: *Jesus seeing his faith*.)**

10. *And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the man sick of the palsy: Be of good heart, son. Thy sins are forgiven thee*. The Gloss says: "His own faith is strengthened by God, where only that of others had been strong; so that being healed within and without, the man arose, and his errors were forgiven him by the merits of others. What wonderful humility! Despised by men, helpless in all his limbs, he is called 'son'; at any rate, he is certainly such because his sins are forgiven."

Note these three points: seeing their faith, Be of good heart, son, and Thy sins are forgiven. Faith without love is empty; a Christian's faith is with love. Take note: it is one thing to 'believe God', another to 'believe that' there is a God, and another to 'believe in' God. To 'believe God' is to believe that what he says is true, which bad people may do; and we may believe a man, without believing in him. To 'believe' in the second sense is to believe in his existence, that he is God; and the devils do this. To 'believe in' God is by believing to love him, to go to him, to adhere to him and be incorporated into his members. By this faith, the wicked man is justified. Where there is this sort of faith, there is trust in God's mercy and remission of sin.

*And, behold,some of the scribes said within themselves: He blasphemeth*. [Mt 9.3]

Because they do not believe Jesus to be true God, they say he blasphemes by forgiving sins.

*And Jesus, seeing their thoughts, said: Why do you think evil in your hearts?* [Mt 9.4]

The word is 'cogitating', a deliberate recalling to mind. Jesus sees their thoughts; as Hebrews says: *All things are naked and open to his eyes* [Heb 4.13]; and Ecclesiasticus:

*The eyes of the Lord are far brighter than the sun,*

*beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep,*

*and looking into the hearts of men, into the most hidden parts.*

*For all things were known to the Lord God before they were created:*

*so also after they were perfected he beholdeth all things*. [Ecclus 23.28-29]

So, Why do you think evil in your hearts? The prophet Micah called down woe on those who pondered evil in their beds, and performed it at morning light [cf. Mic 2.1]. When we dwell with mental pleasure, and consent to evil, in our 'beds' (our hearts), we perform that evil in the morning light, before the Lord's eyes, even if we do not in fact carry it out. He who looks on a woman to lust after her (that is, who looks on her in such a way that he lusts for her) has already committed adultery with her in his heart [cf. Mt 5.28]. The scribes could have known that he was God, from the very fact that he saw their thoughts.

*Which is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say, Arise and walk?* [Mt 9.5]

The Gloss says, "Because you would not believe this spiritual truth, it is proved by a visible sign of no less power; that you might know the hidden power and majesty in the Son of man, in as much as he can forgive sins like God."

11. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause:

*Putting away lying, speak ye the truth, every man with his neighbour; for we are members one of another. Be angry, and sin not. Let not the sun go down upon your anger. Give not place to the devil*. [Eph 4.25-27]

We said just now that there are four virtues that carry the paralysed soul to Jesus, humility, poverty, patience and obedience; by which we put away the four things spoken of by the Apostle. By humility, we put away the lying of pride or vainglory, which lies by claiming to be something, whereas it is nothing. Lying is deceiving another's mind. Speak ye the truth, by love of poverty. Why is it that nowadays almost everyone speaks falsely to his neighbour, if not from avarice? This is what divides from one another those who should be members of Christ. Be angry with yourselves, by repentance, and sin not. The angry man thinks evil, and so the devil gets into him, to perform evil deeds. Patience is necessary, to drive out anger. Alternatively, Be angry means, show such vehement indignation towards yourselves that you desist from sin. Let not the sun which is Christ set, by deserting your mind. He is obscured from us by anger, as by a mountain standing in the way. Here, then, is why the Apostle invites us to have patience. He also invites us to obedience, saying, Give not place to the devil. When the first man fell into disobedience, he gave place to the devil. You must obey, because obedience shuts out the devil, and he cannot get into the soul.

We ask you, then, Lord Jesus Christ, to put away the lying of our pride; to drive out our avarice by poverty; to break our anger with patience; and to crush our disobedience by the obedience of your Passion. By this, may we be presented to you, and receive the forgiveness of our sins; and be made fit to rejoice with you for ever. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(The theme for a sermon on the five sons of Mattathias, and their meaning: *Arise,***

***take up thy bed*.)**

12. There follows, thirdly:

*Then said he to the man sick of the palsy: Arise, take up thy bed and go into thy house. And he arose and went into his house. And the multitude, seeing it*, etc. [Mt 9.6-8]

Note the words, 'Arise', 'take' and 'go'. The palsied man rises, when the sinner deserts the vices in which he has lain. There is a concordance to this in the Book of Maccabees, where it says:

*Mathathias arose and abode in the mountain of Modin. And he had five sons*. [1Mac 2.1-2]

These were Judas, Simon, Jonathan, John and Eleazar. Mathathias means 'gift of God'; he represents the penitent by God's gift arises from sin and goes to abide in mount Modin, which means 'judgement'. St Augustine[1] says, "Go up to the judgement seat of your mind. Let reason be your judge, conscience your accuser, fear the executioner and sorrow the torturer. Let your works stand in place of witnesses." This is mount Modin, and he who abides there has truly risen from sin. Mathathias, the penitent, has five sons: Judas ('confessing'), Simon ('obedient'), Jonathan ('dove'), John ('grace') and Eleazar ('the help of God'). These are the penitent's sons; to him is given the gift of God, from which all these proceed. Judas cleanses, Simon builds, Jonathan renews, John decorates, Eleazar protects and keeps.

Judas cleanses the temple, because confession purges the mind of its vices. It says in the Book of Judges:

*Who shall go up before us against the Chanaanite, and shall be the leader of the war?*

*And the Lord said: Juda shall go up. Behold, I have delivered the land into his hands*. [Jg 1.1-2]

Canaanite means 'jealous', and represents the devil who ardently desires the sinner's soul like a jealous man, and craftily strives to stop it returning to Christ. The penitent must go up against him in confession, drive him out of the land of his heart, and purge it of vices.

Simon builds, because obedience labours to this end, that the edifice of good works grows higher. So Mathathias says of him:

*And behold, I know that your brother Simon is a man of counsel: give ear to him always, and he shall be a father to you*. [1Mac 2.65]

Obedience is a good counsellor, because it teaches us to mortify self-will, which is the way to hell; and to do the will of another, which is the way to heaven. St Gregory[2] says of this building, "Obedience is the sole virtue; the other virtues are contained in it, and it keeps them safe."

Jonathan does not cease to restore the holy places, because with dove-like simplicity he builds up what the craftiness of the ancient Enemy destroys daily, and destroyed in the first man. So it says in Genesis that the dove came to Noah in the ark at evening, carrying an olive branch with green leaves in her mouth [cf. Gen 8.11]. Let us see what is meant by the dove, the evening, Noah, the ark, the olive branch and the green leaves. The dove, careful of its limbs, represents simplicity and purity which take care of our limbs by restraining lust. This dove comes to Noah, the penitent, in the ark of his mind, at 'evening', when the sun of worldly prosperity and the heat of carnal desire are declining in him. It carries an olive branch with green leaves. The branch is constancy of mind; the olive is a serene and cheerful conscience; the green leaves are words of salvation. The dove bears all these things, when simplicity comes to the mind of the penitent; and so Jonathan can restore what had perished.

John decorates the face of the temple with gold crowns, because the grace of the Holy Spirit adorns our works with a pure intention. So Isaiah says:

*He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation,*

*and with the robe of justice he hath covered me;*

*as a bridegroom decked with a crown*. [Is 61.10]

The Lord clothes the penitent with garments of salvation in contrition; he covers him with a robe of justice in confession; and he decks him with a crown like a bridegroom in works of satisfaction which should proceed from purity of mind. But because all these things profit nothing without God's help, the fifth brother, Eleazar, joins in. By God's help, what is begun is increased, what is increased is kept, and what is kept keeps the penitent and crowns him with the rewards of eternal life. So the Lord says to the palsied man, Arise!

**(The theme for a sermon on afflicting the flesh and restraining the senses: *David smote the Philistines*.)**

13. There follows, *Take your bed*. The Gloss says here, "To take up one's bed is to lift the flesh up from earthly desires to the will of the spirit. Then, what was a sign of weakness becomes a proof of health." Take up your bed, then, separating your flesh from earthly things by continence, in hope of heavenly things. There is something similar in the second book of Kings, where it says that:

*David defeated the Philistines, and brought them down. And he took the bridle of tribute out of the hands of the Philistines. And he defeated Moab, and measured them with a*

*line, casting them down to earth. And he measured with two lines, one to put to death, and one to save alive; and Moab was made to serve David under tribute*. [2Kg(Sm) 8.1-2]

Literally, understand the text like this: David defeated the Philistines, and he took the bridle of tribute out of their hands, the power that they had in Israel. And he defeated Moab, and measured them with a line, the one to whom he willed to give the inheritance, casting them down to earth, humbling them greatly. He measured with two lines, etc., deciding at his own pleasure whom to kill, and whom to keep alive.

Morally, the Philistines mean ‘those who fall down from drink’. They stand for the bodily senses, drunk with the drink of worldly vanity, falling into the pit of sin. They are called a ‘double ruin’, because they ruin themselves and the soul. Of this ruin the Lord says:

*Every one that heareth these my words and doth them not shall be like a foolish man that built his house* (his way of life) *upon the sand* (love of temporal things). *And the rain* (of the devil’s temptation) *fell, and the floods* (of carnal desire) *came, and the wind* (of worldly success or failure*) blew; and they beat upon that house. And it fell* (because its foundation was sand, dry sand representing temporal things which lack the moisture of grace); *and great was the fall thereof*. [Mt 7.26-27]

David defeats and humbles the Philistines, when the penitent strikes down his bodily senses by mortifying the flesh, and humbles them by remembering his baseness. Then he takes away the bridle of tribute, the desires of greed and lust which formerly bridled the bodily senses, so that they could not eat the straw of the Lord’s Incarnation, placed in the manger; but could only drink the water of earthly pleasure. A bridled horse cannot eat, but it can drink. So Jeremiah deplores this tribute in Lamentations, saying, *The prince of provinces is made tributary* [Lam 1.1]. The soul was once prince of provinces, the five senses; now it is tributary to carnal desires. But David takes out of their hand (their power) the bridle of tribute, when he takes up his bed, *crucifying the flesh with its vices and concupiscences* [cf. Gal 5.24].

*And he defeated Moab*, etc. Moab is ‘from the father’, meaning the movement of the flesh which we have contracted from our fathers. As often as this Moab arises, we must strike it down, crush it, and cast it down to earth. We measure it by our judgement, with the line of harsh penance. We humble it and apply punishment in proportion to guilt. We should measure with two lines, two sorts of compunction. One refers to sin: this is to death, to mortifying the movement of the flesh; the other refers to desire for glory, life-giving to our spirit. So the Gospel continues: Go to your house. To go to our house is to return to paradise, man’s first home; or to inward care, lest we sin again. He rose, and went to his house. The Gloss says, "It is a great virtue, when without delay the command is accompanied by salvation. How rightly did those present leave their blasphemies in amazement, and turn to praise of so great a majesty."

So there follows: *And the multitude, seeing it, feared, and glorified God that gave such power to men*. [Mt 9.8]. Note that they feared and they glorified. So we say in the Introit

of today's Mass:

*All that thou hast done to us, Lord, thou hast done in true judgement:*

*for we have sinned against thee, and have not obeyed thy commandments*. [cf. Dan 3.28-30]

This makes it clear that the palsied man was struck with illness because of his sins; and he could not be cured until they were forgiven. We should believe all that the Lord has done, because he does them with just judgement; and we should acknowledge our sins and glorify him with the crowds, saying,

*But give glory to thy name, and do with us according to thy mercy.* [cf. Dan 3.42-43]

The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this third clause:

*He that stole, let him now steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing that is good*,

that is: 'take up your bed', because he who intends a good work, takes up the bed of his flesh;

*that he may have something to give to him that suffereth need*. [Eph 4.28]

That is: 'and go to your house.' He goes to his house, when he bestows works of mercy on his soul, which suffers need.

Beloved brothers, let us then ask our Lord Jesus Christ to make us rise from sin, take up the bed of our flesh, and return to the house of heavenly blessedness. May he grant this, who is blessed, sweet and loveable, for ever and ever. Let every soul rising from the bed of the flesh say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] cf. AUGUSTINE, *De diversis, sermo* 351,7; PL 39.1512

[2] GREGORY, *Moralia* XXXV, 14,28; PL 76.765

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the twentieth Sunday after Pentecost: *The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king*; which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon on the threefold temple, and the golden candlestick, and the six reeds and their meaning: *They brought in the candlestick*.)**

1. At that time: Jesus told this parable to his disciples: *The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king, who made a marriage for his son*. [Mt 22.2]

It says in the Book of Maccabees that:

*They brought in the candlestick and the altar of incense and the table into the temple.* [1Mac 4.49]

Let us see what these four mean, allegorically, morally and anagogically. Note that the temple is threefold: the virginal womb, the faithful soul and the heavenly Jerusalem; in each of which are candlestick, altar of incense and table.

Of the temple of the virgin's womb, the third book of Kings recounts that Solomon built the temple from three materials, marble, cedar and gold. The marble he covered with cedar, and the cedar with gold [cf. 3(1)Kg 6.7-22]. The marble represents Blessed Mary's virginity, the cedar (whose smell repels serpents) her humility, and the gold her poverty. The marble of virginity is covered, protected and ornamented with the cedar of humility. A proud virgin is not truly a virgin; and so blessed Mary, as if forgetting her virginity, proffered her humility, saying: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord* [Lk 1.38] The cedar of humility is adorned with the gold of poverty. Often, the evil of pride arise from the abundance of riches. Into this temple were carried the candlestick, altar of incense and table. Just as in the Divinity there are three Persons and one Substance, so in Christ's humanity there are three substances and one Person. Jesus Christ is God and man, made of soul and body. The candlestick represents his Divinity; the altar of incense his soul, full of every odour of virtue; the table his flesh, by which we are refreshed and satisfied in the Sacrament of the altar. Blessed and glorious is this temple, which is enlightened by the candlestick of eternal light, made to smell sweet by the altar of incense, and fed from the table of proposition.

Regarding the second temple, the faithful soul, the Apostle says: *The temple of God is holy, which you are* [1Cor 3.17]. Into this temple we must bring the candlestick of charity, the altar of incense which is devotion of mind, and the 'table of proposition' of the word of holy preaching. Regarding the candlestick of charity, it says in Exodus, where the Lord speaks to Moses:

*Thou shalt make a candlestick of beaten work of the finest gold; the shaft thereof, and the branches, the cups and the balls and the lilies going forth from it. Six branches shall come out of the sides: three out of the one side, and three out of the other*. [Ex 25.31-32]

The candlestick of charity is 'beaten' with the hammer of tribulation, to be increased not in itself, but in the human mind. So St Augustine[1] says, on the Epistle of John, "Perfect charity is this, that someone is prepared even to die for brothers. But is it perfect just as soon as it is born? To become perfect, it must indeed be born; when born, it must be nourished; when nourished, strengthened; when strengthened, perfected; and when it reaches perfection, it says: *I long to be dissolved, and to be with Christ* [Phil 1.23]. Here, clearly, the progress and perfection of charity is outlined."

The candlestick of charity must also be made from the purest gold. It cannot be mingled with any vice, since like gold among metals, charity must be pre-eminent among virtues. From this candlestick go forth cups, balls and lilies. The cups, concave so as to hold and proffer drink, represent humility with compunction of mind. Hollowness receives what is poured in, convexity repels. The round balls represent concern for our neighbour's needs. The lilies are the pureness of chastity. If you have charity, have 'cups' for God, 'balls' for your neighbour, and 'lilies' for yourself.

Note, too, that the candlestick of charity has six branches, three on the right and three on the left, with which it embraces God and neighbour. The three that embrace God are abomination of sin, contempt for temporal things and contemplation of heavenly things. Of the first, the Psalmist says:

*I have hated and abhorred iniquity*. [Ps 118.163]

Of the second, the Apostle says:

*I have counted all things dung, that I may gain Christ and may be found in him*. [cf. Phil 3.8]

Of the third, he says:

*While you look not at the things which are seen, but at the things that are not seen.* [2Cor 4.18]

The three branches that embrace our neighbour are sparing the offender, correcting the misguided, refreshing the hungry. Of the first, the Gospel says:

*Forgive them, they know not what they do*. [cf. Lk 23.24]

Of the second, James says:

*He who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way shall save his soul from death and shall cover a multitude of sins*.[Jas 5.20]

Of the third, Solomon says:

*If thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat; if he thirst, give him to drink.* [Prov 25.21]

If with such a candlestick the altar of devotion and the table of holy preaching are brought into our soul, there will indeed be a holy temple for God to dwell in.

Of the third temple, the heavenly Jerusalem, the Psalm says:

*I will come into thy house* (the Church Militant):

*I will worship towards thy holy temple* (the Church Triumphant);

*and I will give glory to thy name* (in both). [Ps 5.8; 137.2]

So it says in Daniel that:

*Daniel went into his house, and opening the windows in his upper chamber towards Jerusalem, he knelt down three times a day and adored and gave thanks before his God*. [Dan 6.10]

In this temple is a candlestick of light; the Apocalypse says:

*The glory of the Lord hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof*. [Apoc 21.23]

there, too, is an altar of incense:

*An angel came and stood before the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense, that he should offer the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which is before the throne of God. And the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended up before God*. [Apoc 8.3-4]

This is what Raphael spoke of to Tobias:

*When thou didst pray with tears, and didst bury the dead, and didst leave thy dinner... I offered thy prayer to the Lord.* [Tob 12.12]

There is a table, to, referred to in Luke:

*I dispose to you, as my Father hath disposed to me, a kingdom; that you may eat and drink at my table, in my kingdom*. [Lk 22.29-30]

With this threefold temple, we would like to **concord** three weddings, and celebrate them as we **concord** them. They are referred to in today's Gospel: *The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king, who made a marriage for his son*.

2. There are three things to note in this Gospel: first, the preparation of and invitation to the wedding, beginning: *The kingdom of heaven is likened*; second, the destruction of the murderers, and the gathering of good and bad to the wedding, from: *But, when the king had heard of it, he was angry*; thirdly, the condemnation of the man without a wedding garment, from: *And the king went in to see the guests*. In the Introit of today's Mass we sing: *In thy will, O Lord*; and we read the Epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul to the Ephesians: *See therefore how you walk circumspectly*; which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the three clauses of the Gospel. First, *See therefore*; second: *Be not drunk with wine*; third: *But be ye filled with the Holy Spirit*. In this Gospel, the Lord speaks of the wedding which the Apostle invites us to celebrate with psalms, hymns and canticles in today's Epistle; which is why we read it with this Gospel.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A theme on the three weddings and their accompaniments: *The kingdom of heaven is likened*.)**

3. Let us say, then: *The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king*. Note that there are three marriages: of union, of justification and of glorification. The first was celebrated in the temple of the blessed Virgin; the second is daily celebrated in the temple of the faithful soul; the third will be celebrated in the temple of heavenly glory. In a marriage, two people come together, the bridegroom and the bride. Two divided families are united by the good of matrimony, when from each side, one takes another as spouse. Great was the separation between God and ourselves, and to end it and to make peace it was needful that the Son of God should take a bride from our family. To settle the arrangements, many representatives and intermediaries came and made their pleas, and were hard put to it to obtain what they sought; but at last the Father agreed, and sent his Son, who united himself to our nature in the bride-chamber of the blessed Virgin. Thus the Father made a wedding feast for his Son.

Regarding this, St John Damascene[2] says: "After the holy Virgin gave her consent, the Holy Spirit came upon her, according to the word of God spoken by the Angel, purifying

her and preparing her to be able to receive the divine Word, and to bear it. Then He who is the Wisdom and Power of the most High God, overshadowed her; the Son of God, *homoousios* (that is, consubstantial) with the Father, being as it were the divine seed. He joined to himself, from the most pure and holy blood of that Virgin, our ancient bespattered flesh, animated by a rational and intellectual soul; not by natural sowing, but creating it by the Holy Spirit." He also says: " The Word of God assumed everything that he had established in our nature, body and intellectual soul. He assumed the whole, wholly; to confer salvation freely upon the whole of me." The Divinity might have sought to be married more nobly; but the flesh could not possibly have wed more gloriously.

The second marriage is celebrated when, at the coming of the Holy Spirit's grace, the sinful soul is converted. Whence he says in the prophet Hosea: *I will go and return to my first husband, because it was better with me then, than now* [Hos 2.7]; and a little later:

*She shall call me, My husband; and she shall call me no more Baali. And I will take the names of Baalim out of her mouth; and she shall no more remember their name.And in that day I will make a covenant with them, with the beasts of the field and with the fowls of the air and with the creeping things of the earth; and I will destroy the bow and the sword and war out of the land; and I will make them sleep secure.* [Hos 2.16-18]

The soul's husband is the Holy Spirit's grace, and when by an inner inspiration it calls her to repentance, the calling of vice is quite useless. No more shall she use the title 'Baal', master and devourer, the name of Pride which seeks to be master, of Greed and Lust that seek to devour. Grace takes these names from the penitent's mouth. *Let old matters depart from your mouth* [1Kg(Sm) 2.3], he says; so that not just the sin but all its accompaniments and imaginations are put from heart and mouth. In that day, when grace is poured in to illuminate the soul, he will make a covenant, will be reconciled with sinners: whether they be 'beasts of the field' (miserly and rapacious), 'fowls of the air' (proud), or 'creeping things of the earth' (gluttonous and lustful). He will destroy out of the land (the sinner's mind) the bow of devilish temptation, the glittering sword of worldly prosperity, and the war of the flesh. In this way, he will make them sleep secure, and celebrate the marriage like bridegroom and bride in the chamber of a pure conscience.

The third marriage will be celebrated on the day of judgement, at the coming of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ: of him it is said:

*Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye forth to meet him*. [Mt 25.6]

He will take as his bride the Church, of which St John says in the Apocalypse:

*Come and I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb... And he shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God*. [Apoc 21.9-11]

The Church of the faithful comes down from God out of heaven, because she accepts from God that her conversation is in heaven, where now she lives by faith and hope, and in a little while will celebrate the marriage with her Bridegroom; as the Apocalypse says:

*Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb*. [Apoc 19.9]

Of these three marriages, the Lord says in Hosea:

*I will espouse thee to me for ever.* [Hos 2.19]

This is the marriage of glorification. Isaiah says:

*Joy everlasting shall be on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness*. [Is 51.11]

Hosea continues:

*And I will espouse thee to me in justice and judgement and in mercy and in commiserations.* [Hos 2.19]

This is the marriage of justification. In the judgement of confession, where the soul judges and accuses herself before her confessor, and in the justice of satisfaction where she exercises justice in herself, the Lord espouses the soul to himself in mercy, by forgiving her sins, and in commiserations by conferring grace and keeping her to the end. Finally:

*And I will espouse thee to me in faith*. [Hos 2.20]

This is the marriage of union. It was in the faith of the blessed Virgin, who believed the Angel, that he espoused our nature to himself. So let us say, then*: The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king, who made a marriage for his son*. The Gloss says: "The kingdom of heaven, which is the present Church, or congregation of the just, is like to a king (God the Father) who made a marriage for his Son when by the mystery of the Incarnation he joined the Church to his Son."

**(A theme on the Annunciation of the Lord: *Wisdom hath built herself a house*; and the rest that follows.)**

4. There follows:

*And he sent his servants to call them that were invited to the marriage; and they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying: Tell them that were invited, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my beeves and fatlings are killed, and all things are ready. Come ye to the marriage*. [Mt 22.3-4]

This is what Solomon says in Proverbs:

*Wisdom hath built herself a house; she hath hewn her out seven pillars.*

*She hath slain her victims, mingled her wine, and set forth her table.*

*She hath sent her maids to invite to the tower, and to the walls of the city*. [Prov 9.1-3]

Wisdom (the Son of God) has built the house of his humanity in the womb of the blessed Virgin, a house supported by the seven columns of the sevenfold gift of grace. This has the same meaning as: *he made a marriage for his son*. *She hath slain her victims, mingled her wine, and set forth her table* means the same as: *Behold, I have prepared my dinner*, etc. And, *She hath sent her maids*, etc. is the same as, *he sent his servants* etc.

Note that the Lord calls and invites sinners to the three marriages we have spoken of, represented by the tower and walls of the city. The tower is the humility of the Lord's Incarnation; the walls are works of penitence, whereby one goes up to the city of heavenly glory. He calls them by his preachers, who are called servants and maids. In Luke, they say: *We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which we ought to do* [Lk 17.10]. They are called 'maids' because of the solicitous care they take of souls, as maids towards their mistress; as the Psalm says:

*As the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress*. [Ps 122.2]

To these three marriages refer the three things mentioned in the Gospel and in Solomon (*Behold, I have prepared my dinner*) regarding the marriage of union. The Gloss says: "The dinner said to be prepared, means the Incarnation fulfilled;" and it is so that those invited might come more keenly that the victims have been slain. In ancient times, 'victims' meant sacrifices after victory, carried bound to the altar. Here, the 'victims' are the apostles, and their successors, who gave their bodies to punishment, that they might summon the peoples to the marriage of the Lord's Incarnation. Moses says of them in Deuteronomy:

*They shall call the people to the mountain; there shall they sacrifice the victims of justice*. [Dt 33.19]

The Apostles called the peoples to the mountain of faith in the Lord's Incarnation, and there, to enlarge that faith, they sacrificed themselves as victims of justice, to make just the unjust. *The just man liveth from faith* [Gal 3.11].

*My beeves are killed*, in the marriage of justification, that is, of penitence. The oxen are killed when proud sinners are humbled, being mortified by penance. they then belong to the Lord, not to themselves. They are 'their own' who *seek the things that are their own*

*and not the things that are Jesus Christ's* [Phil 2.21]. John says: *His own received him not* [Jn 1.11]. When his neck is as stiff as a bull's, and his eyes are fierce with anger, a man is 'his own'. When his neck is brought to the dust, his pride humbled in the remembrance of his own worthlessness, and killed by the mortification of penance, then he belongs not to himself, but to the one who bought him. At this wedding-feast, Wisdom mixes the wine when she tempers the joys of the flesh and the world with the bitterness of tears; as Isaiah says:

*The drink shall be bitter to them that drink it*. [Is 24.9]

The drink of worldly joys, when mingled with the tears of penitence, is bitter to those who drink it, namely to those who are penitent.

*My fatlings are killed, and all things are ready*, in the marriage of heavenly glory. 'Fatlings' are those perfect men who are full of charity within, and seek the things above on wings of contemplation. They are 'killed', since by the death of the flesh they are made to rest. In this marriage, Wisdom prepares a table, as said above: *that you may eat and drink at my table*.

Few or none are those who come to these three marriages. They shrink from the poverty and humility of the Lord's Incarnation, they fear the harshness of penance, they do not desire the banquet of the heavenly table; they ardently cling to temporal things. Thus there follows:

*But they neglected and went their ways, one to his farm and another to his merchandise*. [Mt 22.5]

The Gloss says that to 'go to one's farm' is to devote oneself overmuch to earthly labour; to 'go to one's merchandise' is to cling to earthly wealth. (See the second clause of the Gospel: *A certain man made a great supper* [Pentecost II])

There follows: *And the rest laid hands on his servants and, having treated them contumeliously, put them to death*. [Mt 22.6]

There is a **concordance** to this in the second book of Maccabees, where it tyells of the seven brothers horribly killed by Antiochus, together with their mother [cf. 2Mac 7.1-19]; and of Eleazar, who,

*choosing rather a most glorious death than a hateful life, went forward voluntarily to the torment*. [2Mac 6.19]

5. The first part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this first clause:

*See how you walk circumspectly; not as unwise, but as wise*. [Eph 5.15-16]

Note that there are three verses in this first part of the Epistle, **concordant** with the three marriages. They are: ‘*See how*’, ‘*redeeming the time*’ and ‘*be not unwise*’. He who is going to the marriage of the Lord’s Incarnation walks circumspectly, because he is walking in the light, and whoever walks in the light does not stumble. Isaiah says:

*The Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brightness of thy rising*. [Is 60.3]

Those attending the marriage of Incarnate Wisdom are not unwise, but are made truly wise; as Wisdom says in Proverbs:

*Counsel and equity is mine, prudence is mine, strength is mine* [Prov 8.14].

These are what make man wise: counsel, to flee the world; equity, to give to each what belongs to him; prudence, to beware of danger; strength, to remain firm in adversity.

He comes to the marriage of penitence, who redeems his mis-spent time: *redeeming the time, because the days are evil* [Eph 5.15-17]. The Gloss, quoting St Augustine, says: "The days are called evil because of man’s malice and misery. He redeems it if he loses, or gives away, what is his own, so as to leave room for God; as one gives a coin in exchange for wine. So the Gospel says: *If a man will contend with thee in judgement and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him* [Mt 5.40]. To have a quiet heart, do not waste time."

He who desires the marriage of heavenly glory is prudent, not imprudent. The prudent man is the man who foresees. He *tastes and sees how sweet the Lord is* [cf. Ps 33.9], and in this sweetness he understands the will of God.

We ask you then, Lord Jesus Christ, to make us come in faith and humility to the wedding feast of your Incarnation; to celebrate the marriage of penitence whereby we may attend the wedding of heavenly glory. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(The theme for a sermon on the three tabernacles, which are concordant with the three weddings: *There shall be destruction wherewith the Lord will strike*.)**

6. There follows, secondly:

*But, when the king had heard of it, he was angry; and sending his armies, he destroyed those murderers and burnt their city*. [Mt 22.7]

The Gloss says: "Previously, he was called a man, when he was inviting, and doing

works of mercy; now, in the judgement, he is called only a king." As the Psalm says: *Mercy and truth shall go before thy face* [Ps 88.15]. There was mercy in his first coming, in the second there will be true judgement. Christ has been called a bee[3] which has the honey of mercy and the sting of justice. The prophet Malachi says: *For he is like a refining fire and like the fuller's herb* [Mal 3.2]. The fuller's herb is borage, from which loaves called 'herbatic' are made, which those who whiten clothes dry and use for soap. Jesus Christ is for the time being like the fuller's herb, cleansing souls from sin by his mercy; it time to come he will be like a burning fire to the wicked, casting them into the furnace of hell. So it goes on, Sending his armies, etc. The Gloss says, "He sends his armies of angels, through whom he will do justice, destroying sinners and their city (the flesh they live in) as he burns the soul in hell." Those who sinned in body and soul, will be punished in both.

There follows*: Then saith he to his servants: The marriage indeed is ready; but they that were invited were not worthy* [Mt 22.8]. The grace of God is ready; he who refuses what is offered, or does not keep what he has, makes himself unworthy. The wedding feast is ready; why do you not come? Why do you not go in? Why do you make yourselves unworthy? Hear what the Lord threatens through the prophet Zechariah:

*There shall be destruction wherewith the Lord will strike all nations that will not go up to keep the feast of tabernacles*. [Zach 14.18]

There are three tabernacles, **concordant** with the three marriages. The first tabernacle is the Lord's Incarnation, of which Isaiah says:

*And there shall be a tabernacle for a shade in the daytime from the heat;*

*and for a security and covert from the whirlwind and from rain*. [Is 4.6]

When the Son of God took a body from the blessed Virgin, a tabernacle to live in like a pilgrim and guest, he made for us a kind of 'umbrella' against the heat of the day, worldy prosperity. The Psalm says: *Thou hast overshadowed my head in the day of battle* [Ps 139.8], worldly prosperity which greatly assails the poor of Christ. He who lacks the umbrella of the Lord's poverty will find the sun strike upon his head, so that he dies. The Book of Judith tells how

*Her husband was Manasses, who died in the time of the barley harvest. For he was standing over them that bound sheaves in the field, and the heat came upon his head, and he died*. [Jdt 8.2-3]

And you find the same in the fourth book of Kings, where the son of the Sunamite woman went out to his father to the reapers, and said to his father: *My head acheth... and he died* [4(2)Kg 4.18-20]. Manasses means 'forgotten'; he represents the covetous and avaricious man who forgets the Lord's poverty as he tries to bind the sheaves of riches and honour in the field of temporal abundance, and the heat of worldy prosperity

strikes his head (his mind) so that he dies. You must understand the same of the 'boy', the carnal and lustful man, of whom Isaiah says*: The child shall die a hundred years old; and the sinner being a hundred years old shall be accursed* [Is 65.20]. The Philosopher[3] says, "Malice is what will prevent you reaching old age."

The humanity of Christ is a 'security' for us, as the Psalm says: *The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do unto me* [Ps 117.6]. It is our 'covert', so that we say: *Protect me under the shadow of thy wings* [Ps 16.8], from the whirlwind of the devil's temptation and the rain of carnal desire.

The second tabernacle is penitence; as the Canticles say*: I am black but beautiful, like the tents of Cedar* [Cant 1.4]. (See the Gospel: *When the unclean spirit* [Lent III, fourth clause])

The third tabernacle is heavenly glory, whence: *How lovely are thy tabernacles*, etc. [Ps 83.2]. If anyone will not go up to celebrate the festival of these tabernacles, the Lord will strike him with the ruin of eternal death. The festival of the first tabernacle is celebrated in faith and humility; of the second in contrition of heart; of the third in the sweetness of contemplation. The marriage is ready, but those invited to it are not worthy; so- Woe to those who make themselves unworthy, clinging to things that are worthless, vile and transitory, the dung of temporal things. *Go ye therefore, you preachers, into the highways; and as many as you shall find, call to the marriage* [Mt 22.9]. The Gloss says: "The highways are our unsuccessful actions; for men are often easily converted when they find no success in their earthly activity." (See the third clause of the Gospel*: A certain man made a great supper* [Pentecost II]).

*And his servants, going forth into the ways, gathered together all that they found, both bad and good; and the marriage was filled with guests*. [Mt 22.10]

The Gloss says: "As the Church stands between heaven and hell, it collects good and bad indiscriminately;" Peter and Judas, oil and dregs or sediment, grain and the chaff which is threshed away to leave the wheat. The flail of the devil's temptation threshes sinners like straw. Ecclesiasticus says: *Winnow not with every wind, and go not into every way* [Ecclus 5.11]; which is pride, from which all the devil's ways proceed. As Job says: *He beholdeth every high thing; he is king over all the children of pride* [Job 41.25].

**(Against drunkenness: *Be not drunk with wine, wherein is luxury*; and the rest that follows on the same subject.)**

7. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause: *And be not drunk with wine, wherein is luxury*; I want to discuss this verse more fully, and show how great a danger there is in wine. Genesis says:

*And Noe, a husbandman, began to till the ground and planted a vineyard, and drinking of the wine was made drunk, and was uncovered in his tent*. [Gen 9.20-21]

Here we see, literally, how great is the misery that comes from immoderate use of wine.

Morally: Noah is the prelate who by preaching ‘tills the ground’, the minds of those subject to him. He ‘plants a vineyard’ when he edifies them to perform good works, and he ‘drinks the wine’ when he is pleased with them, in accordance with the Apostle’s words: *Who planteth a vineyard and eateth not of the fruit thereof?* [1Cor 9.7]. But when sometimes he is vainglorious about this, or falls into sin in some other way, he is ‘drunk’. From this follows his ‘stripping’, the publication of his hidden sin. This is how Saul relieved himself in the first book of Kings, going into a cave to empty his bowels [cf. 1Kg (Sm) 24.4]. St Gregory[4] says that to empty one’s bowel is to vent the evil conceived within the heart as a deed of foul odour. Ham, the wicked subject, divulges the sin of his superior; while Shem and Japhet, the good subjects, turn away their faces and cover it with a cloak. St Gregory says that we turn away from what we disapprove; they took a covering with averted faces, because while they acknowledged the fact, they reverenced their master, and did not want to look at what they covered. So, *Be not drunk with wine, wherein is luxury*.

Jeremiah says:

*I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine and cups: and I said to them: Drink ye wine. And they answered: We will not drink wine, because Jonadab, the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying: You shall drink no wine, neither you nor your children, for ever. Neither shall ye build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyards, nor have any; but you shall dwell in tents all your days*. [Jer 35.5-7]

And a little further on:

*And Jeremias said to the house of the Rechabites: Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father... there shall not be wanting a man of the race of Jonadab standing before me for ever*. [Jer 35.18,19]

Therefore, *Be not drunk with wine, wherein is luxury*.

Whoever is drunk with wine is not worthy to come to the wedding banquet; he is more worthy ro be burnt with his city, like a murderer. Thus there is a **concordance** to this in the Book of Maccabees, at the end of the first book, where it tells how Ptolemy the son of Abobus made a great banquet for Simon.

*And when Simon and his sons had drunk plentifully, Ptolemy and his men rose up and took their weapons and entered into the banqueting place and slew him and his two sons and some of his servants. And he committed a great treachery in Israel*. [1Mac 16. 16-17]

See what great evils come from wine, whereby the devil slays not only carnal people, but

even penitents (represented by Simon), their works (his sons) and their purity (his servants). So, *Be not drunk with wine, wherein is luxury*.

Hosea says, *Fornication and wine and drunkenness take away the heart* [Hos 4.11], and so Genesis tells how Lot had two daughters, *and the elder said to the younger, "Come, let us make our father drunk with wine, and sleep with him, to preserve the seed of our father." And they gave him wine to drink and slept with him* [cf. Gen 19. 31-35]. See how it takes away the heart!

Morally: Lot stands for the just man, and his two daughters are perverse suggestion and perverse pleasure, which sometimes befuddle the mind of a just man and make him ‘Lot’ indeed (meaning, ‘falling’). There is a **concordance** in Isaiah:

*Out of the root of the serpent shall come forth a basilisk,*

*and his seed shall swallow the bird.* [Is 14.29]

The root of the serpent is man’s sensuality; and from it comes the basilisk of temptation and the seed of pleasure, which swallows the bird of reason, which can fly above. So, *Be not drunk with wine, wherein is luxury*.

Solomon says of this in Proverbs:

*Who hath woe? Whose father hath woe? Who hath contentions? Who falls into pits? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? Surely they that pass their time in wine, and study to drink off their cups. Look not upon the wine when it is yellow, when the colour thereof shineth in the glass. It goeth in pleasantly; but in the end it will bite like a snake, and will spread abroad poison like a basilisk*. [Prov 23.29-32]

This is particularly applicable to luxury: so, *Be not drunk with wine, wherein is luxury*.

We ask you, therefore, Lord Jesus Christ, to keep us and our city from ruin and the fire of hell; and make us to go up to the feast of tabernacles, to be free from being drunk with wine and its luxury, so as to deserve to eat and drink at your table in your kingdom. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A theme on the three wedding garments, which are concordant to the three weddings: *When the king went in*.)**

8. There follows, thirdly: *And the king went in to see the guests; and he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment* [Mt 22.11]. Note that as there are three weddings, so there are three wedding-garments, of fine linen, embroidery and scarlet. At the first

wedding, fine linen is needed; at the second, embroidery; at the third, scarlet. Whoever wants to go in to the marriage of the Lord's Incarnation, must have a wedding garment of fine linen, namely the cleanliness of chastity. So it says in the Apocalypse:

*The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath prepared herself. And it is granted to her that she should clothe herself with fine linen, glittering and white*. [Apoc 19.7-8]

The lamb, more than all other animals, recognises its mother; thus it represents Jesus Christ who, when hanging on the Cross, recognised his Mother among thousands of Jews, and commended her, a Virgin, to a virgin. The marriage of the Lamb is come, namely the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, and so his wife, Holy Church, or any faithful soul, should prepare herself by faith and clothe herself in fine linen, chastity which glitters as to conscience, white as to the body. How can anyone attend the marriage of the Son of God and the blessed Virgin, who is not clad in the fine linen of chastity? How can he enter the church, join the gathering of the faithful, presume to be present at the making of the lord's Body, if he knows he lacks the glittering white linen of inward and outward chastity? To him, the king says ironically, *Friend, how camest thou in hither not having on a wedding garment?* [Mt 22.12] The Son of the blessed Virgin delights exceedingly in the cleanness of chastity.

**(On the fourfold garden and its meaning: *My beloved went down into the garden*.)**

That is why the Bride says of him in the Canticles:

*My beloved is gone down into his garden,*

*to the bed of aromatical spices,*

*to feed in the gardens and to gather lilies.*

*I to my beloved, and my beloved to me,*

*who feedeth among the lilies*.[Cant 6.1-2]

The garden of the beloved is the soul of the just man, in which are two things: the bed of aromatical spices, which is humility, mother of the other virtues; and the lilies of twofold continence. Therefore the beloved goes down into this garden, and feeds there. The garden is fourfold: of nuts, fruits, vines, and spices. There are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of fear, knowledge, and piety, counsel and fortitude, understanding and wisdom [cf. Is 11.2-3]. The soul of the just man is made a garden of nuts by the spirit of fear, which has in itself these three: bitterness in the rind, hardness in the shell, and sweetness in the kernel. The garden of nuts is penitence, which is bitter in the flesh, hard in trouble and mental endurance, sweet in spiritual joy. Then, by the spirit of knowledge and piety, the soul is made a garden of apples, having the gentleness of mercy. By the

spirit of counsel and fortitude it is made a garden of vines, having the fervour of charity. By the spirit of understanding and wisdom it is made a garden of spices, sending its scent in the gateways [cf. Cant 7.13].

**(On the threefold war: *The third war was in Gob*; and on the same subject, on the nature of the salamander, the sparrow, and the pains of hell.)**

9. Again, whoever wants to enter the wedding-feast of penitence, must have the embroidered tunic of humility of heart. Genesis says:

*Israel loved Joseph above all his sons, because he had him in his old age; and he made him a coat of divers colours*. [Gen 37.3]

Israel (God the Father) loves Joseph (Jesus Christ), his own son, more than all his adopted children because he begot him of the virgin Mary in his 'old age', that is, when the world was growing old. He madcles, which are **concordant** with the three aforementioned wedding feasts. At the wedding feast of the Lord's Incarnation you must have the psalm of right action, so as to do what you believe, and be a good psalmist upon the ten-stringed harp of the keeping of the ten Commandments. So you sing a psalm to God. At the wedding feast of penitence, you must have the hymn of confession and humility, of which the Psalm says:

# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

[PROLOGUE FOR NOVEMBER]

We proclaim our thanks, and pay a tribute of praise to the Divine Majesty, by whose grace we have reached the first Sunday of the ninth month. Note, then, that from the first of this month of November, until the first of December, there are read in Church Ezekiel, Daniel and the twelve Prophets, which we want to divide as follows: on the first Sunday Ezekiel is set, on the second Daniel, on the third and fourth the twelve Prophets. In this month there are four Sundays, on which four Gospels are read; with the clauses of which, as God may grant, we wish to **concord** various texts from the aforesaid books.

## TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost: *There was a certain ruler*; which is divided into two clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon on the mortification of carnal desires and the confession of sins, which is compared to the sapphire, on account of its four properties: *Above the firmament*.)**

1. At that time: *There was a certain ruler, whose son was sick at Capharnaum*. [Jn 4.46]

Ezekiel says:

*Above the firmament that was over the living creatures' heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of the sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as of the appearance of a man above upon it*. [Ezek 1.26]

Note that in this text four things are mentioned: first the living creatures, second the firmament, third the sapphire throne, and fourth the appearance of a man. The living creatures are carnal desires, that like brute beasts pollute the land of our mind; and so the Lord says in Ezekiel:

*Thou wast cast out upon the face of the earth in the abjection of thy soul...*

*I saw that thou wast trodden under foot in thy own blood,* [Ezek 16.5-6]

meaning the uncleanness of carnal desire. The head of the living creatures is the principle of carnal desire, of which it says in Genesis, *She shall crush thy head* [Gen 3.15]. This happens when the firmament is over the head of the living creatures. The firmament is contrition; so that it says in Genesis: *Let there be a firmament made amidst the waters, dividing the waters from the waters* [Gen 1.6]. The mind of the penitent, contrite for sin, possesses the upper waters of flowing grace, and the nether waters of flooding desire [cf. Jg 1.15], which should be below her, since they always lead to a fall. Alternatively, the upper waters stand for reason, the higher power of the soul, that always stimulates a man to good; while the nether waters are sensuality. There is something similar in Ezekiel, who says:

*And I saw as it were the resemblance of amber... from his loins and upward;*

*and from his loins downward, as it were the appearance of fire*. [Ezek 1.27]

The Gloss says, "The parts above the loins, where sense and reason are situated, do not need to be burnt with fire or flames. They require the most precious and pure metal. But the parts from the loins downwards, where sexual activity is found, inciting to vice, need purification by flames."

Thus the firmament should be above the heads of the living creatures, contrition of heart crushing the principle of carnal desire; and then there will be the appearance of a sapphire stone, resembling a throne, above the firmament. The throne stands for confession of sins, and rightly so. Just as a man lowers himself to sit upon a throne, so in confession the penitent should lower himself, judging and condemning himself, and scattering all the evil he has done. As Proverbs says: *The king that sitteth upon the throne... scattereth away all evil with his look* [Prov 20.8].

And note that confession should have the appearance of the sapphire stone, which has four characteristics. It is like the clear sky, it sparkles like a star, it staunches blood and it extinguishes a burning coal. In the same way, the confession of sins should be like a clear sky by hope of pardon; it should say with the thief, *Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom* [Lk 23.42]. It should also sparkle within like a star, fixed in its place to signify the firm intention never to relapse. Just as the stars keep a fixed place in the heavens, yet move perpetually, so the penitent should be fixed immovably in his penitence, and wherever he goes and moves have the firm intention never to fall again into sin. If confession does not show this 'star', penance should in no way be enjoined. The Lord says, *Go, now sin no more* [Jn 8.11]. He does not say, "You will not sin"; he says, "Do not sin". Again, confession should staunch blood, the pleasure in sin that flows so easily, yet which confession should stem, lest it flow out of the heart and bodily senses. If confession has these three qualities, it will have the fourth as well; it will extinguish the burning coal of the devil's suggestion. On such a throne rests Jesus Christ, God and man, like amber, freeing the soul of the penitent from every weakness of sin, just as he freed the ruler's son from bodily weakness; as is told in today's Gospel: *There was a certain ruler, whose son was sick at Capharnaum*.

2. There are two points to note in this Gospel, the sickness of the ruler's son, and the belief of the ruler himself. The first begins, *There was a certain ruler*. The second begins, *The man believed the word*, etc. In the Introit of today's Mass we sing: *If thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities*..., and we read the Epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul to the Ephesians, *Be strengthened in the Lord*., which we will divide into two parts and **concord** with the aforesaid clauses of the Gospel. The first part is, *Be strengthened*. The second part is, *Stand, having your loins girt about*. Attend to the fact that in today's Gospel John speaks of the sickness and the healing of the ruler's son; while in the Epistle the Apostle speaks of the devil's temptation, which weakens the soul, and the armour of God, which strongly resists the devil. That is why this Epistle is read with this Gospel.

[THE FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A theme on the nine orders of angels and their meaning: *A certain ruler*.)**

3. Let us say, then: *There was a certain ruler, whose son was sick at Capharnaum*.

Let us see what these four: the ruler, his son and his sickness, and Capharnaum, mean; and say a little about each. Any faithful person is called a 'ruler', after the King of kings of all creation, the Lord Jesus Christ, who rules angels in heaven and men on earth; because he has within himself a kind of representation of the heavenly orders, and consists of the four elements from which all creation is made. There are nine orders, which we will arrange in three orders of three.

In the first order are Angels, Archangels and Virtues; the Angels representing obedience to the commandments, the Archangels the keeping of the counsels, and the Virtues the miracles of a holy life. You belong to the angelic order when you obey the Lord's command; thus the prophet Malachi says: The lips of a priest shall keep knowledge, etc. [Mal 2.7]. Regarding this, see the Gospel, *A blind man sat by the way* [Quinquagesima]. You belong to the order of Archangels when you strive to fulfil not only the commandments, but also the counsels of Jesus Christ. Whence Isaiah counsels you: *Take counsel, gather a council* [Is 16.3]. You belong to the choir of Virtues when you shine with the wonders of a holy life. Whence it says in John: *He that believeth in me, the works that I do he also shall do; and greater than these shall he do* [Jn 14.12]. The Gloss says, "What the Lord does in us with our co-operation is greater than everything he does without us; that a just man is made from a wicked one is greater than all heaven and earth and the rest. Those things pass away, but this remains; and in them there is only God's work, but in this there is also his image. And though he created the angels, it seems a greater thing to justify sinners than to create just men; for though each manifests an equal power, this shows a greater mercy."

**(For religious: *I saw an angel coming down*.)**

4. In the second order are Principalities, Powers and Dominations. Note that there are three things in us which we should control, if not as kings then at least as rulers. These are our thoughts, our eyes and our tongue. Principalities subdue the evil spirits, and we should subdue evil thoughts, which are set alight by evil. Whence John says in the Apocalypse:

*I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand; and he laid hold of the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil, and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years*. [Apoc 20.1-2]

Moral interpretation. The angel is the just man, who comes down from heaven when he strives to shape his way of life, as he lives on earth, according to the purity of heaven. The key is discretion, with which the just man closes and opens the abyss of thought. He 'closes' when he restrains them, he 'opens' them when he judges them. The chain in his hand is penance in his works. A chain holds fast, and holds by means of many links. When contrition is linked to confession, confession to satisfaction, and satisfaction to love of neighbour, there is made a great chain with which the just man can bind the dragon, the old serpent who is the devil and Satan. 'Dragon' denotes the spirit of pride, 'serpent' the thoughts of poisonous lust, 'devil' ('the one cast down to his ruin', in Hebrew) avarice, and Satan, the adversary, the malice of discord. The just man binds all these with a chain for a thousand years; subduing the dragon of pride by contrition of heart, the serpent of lust by confession, the devil of avarice by satisfaction and almsdeeds, and the Satran of discord by love of neighbour. This 'for a thousand years', the perfect number, meaning by final perseverance.

Again, we ought to have power over our eyes, which are like *the robbers who had stolen a little maid out of the land of Israel* [cf. 4(2)Kg 5.2], that is, modesty from the mind of the just man. We should say with Job: I made a covenant with my eyes, that I would not so much as think upon a virgin [Job 31.1]. In Genesis, the Lord says to Cain:

*If thou do well, shalt thou not receive? But if ill, shalt not sin henceforth be present at the door? But the lust thereof shall be under thee, and thou shalt have dominion over it*. [Gen 4.7]

Sin at the door is the concupiscence of the flesh in the eyes. If we exercise power over them, our carnal appetite will be under us, being subject to the yoke of reason.

Again, we should have dominion over our tongue, which is like a harlot, *talkative and wandering... not bearing to be quiet, not able to abide still at home; now abroad, now in the streets, now lying in wait at the corners* [Prov 7.11-12]. Otherwise, as James says, *it defileth the whole body and inflameth the wheel of our nativity, and kindleth a great wood* [Jas 3.6,5]. If we abide in this threefold order of Principalities, Powers and Dominations, we shall truly be rulers.

**(On the threefold charity: *One cherub stretched out his arm*.)**

5. In the third order are Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim. We are Thrones when we humble ourselves within ourselves, and judge ourselves. Whence it says in the psalm: *Give to the king thy judgement, O God* [Ps 71.2]. God gives his judgement to the king (that is, to the just man) that he may judge himself, so that God may not find anything to condemn in him. The Apostle says, If we should judge ourselves, we should not be judged [1Cor 11.31]. O God, give me your judgement, that I may make your judgement my own, and in making my own judgement, I may escape yours! *It is fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* [Heb 10.31].

Again, Cherubim represent the fulness of knowledge, which is charity. Whoever has this is full, and knows how he should walk. We are Cherubim, then, when we do good with charity. Whence it says in Ezekiel:

*One cherub stretched out his arm from the midst of the cherubims to the fire that was between the cherubims: and he took and put it into the hands of him that was clothed with linen*. [Ezek 10.7]

Note that in this text cherubim are referred to once in the singular and twice in the plural, because chaity is threefold: to yourself, to God and to your neighbour. You who are a cherub as to yourself, then, should stretch out the hand of holy working from the midst of the cherubim (the charity of God) towards the fire of a holy life, which is between the cherubim (holy and charitable men), and of that fire (the example of a holy life) give to the man clothed in linen (any faithful Christian, clad in the faith of the Lord’s Incarnation). As the Apostle says, *As many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ* [Gal 3.27]. Unless you are first a cherub in yourself, you cannot stretch out your hand from the midst of the cherubim to the fire which is between the cherubim; so begin with your own charity first, and then you can have charity for others.

Again, Seraphim means ‘burning’. We are Seraphim when we are on fire with compunction, overflowing with tears for the upper and the nether watery ground [cf. Jg 1.14-15*]. I am come to cast fire on the earth, and what will I, but that it be kindled?* [Lk 12.49] says the Lord: that it may melt what is frozen. Whence the Bride says in Canticles: *My soul melted when my beloved spoke* [Cant 5.6]. Whoever, then, represents in himself these nine orders, as we have explained them, and from them orders and shapes the life of his body, made up of the four elements, can be truly called a ‘ruler’, of whom it is said, A certain ruler.

**(On the four abominations, firstly against prelates and priests: *Son of man, lift up your eyes*.)**

6. There follows, *Whose son was sick at Capharnaum*. The ruler’s son is the soul of anyone faithful to Jesus Christ; who lives unharmed as long as he lives in the order described. But when he dwells at Capharnaum, he becomes sick to death. Capharnaum means ‘field of fatness’ or ‘farm of consolation’. The four states of men are expressed in these four words: field, fatness, farm and consolation: that is, clergy, religious, poor and

rich. Clergy in the field of the Church are proud of the patrimony of Christ. Religious in quiet and peace, like a rich orchard, are gnawed by the worm of concupiscence. Poor layfolk labour as on a farm, and mourn because of their poverty. Rich people rejoice in the comfort of riches, and so forget the Lord. All these are sick at Capharnaum.

Four abominations are **concordant** to these four, which the Lord showed to Ezekiel, in whom there is a **concordance** where the Lord says:

*Son of man, lift up thy eyes... And I lifted up my eyes towards the way of the north: and behold, on the north side of the gate of the altar the idol of jealousy in the very centre...to provoke to jealousy. And he said to me: Son of man, dost thou see, thinkest thou, what these are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should depart far off from my sanctuary?* [Ezek 8.5,3,6]

See the pride of the clergy. The idol of jealousy is the pride of the clergy, which provokes the Lord to jealousy, that is, to indignation and punishment. As Deuteronomy says, *They have provoked me with that which was no God* [Dt 32.21]. The proud prelate of the Church, or minister of the altar, what is he but an idol of jealousy at the very entrance to the altar? Alas, what abominations these commit in the house of the Lord!

Therefore, in the same Prophet, the Lord says of them*: They shall violate my secret place, and emissaries shall enter into it and defile it* [Ezek 7.22]. The word 'emissary' strictly refers to a stallion set aside to mate with mares. These stallions are proud and lustful clerics, who violate the secret of the Lord, the Body of Jesus Christ; and as far as they are able tread it underfoot and defile the holy Church. Therefore the Lord adds, I shall depart far off from my sanctuary. It says in the first book of Kings that on account of the sins of the priests Ophni and Phinees, who lay with the women that waited at the door of the tabernacle [1Kg(Sm) 2.22], the Ark of the Lord of hosts, who sits upon the Cherubim, was captured.

**(Against prelates and religious who give the patrimony of the Crucified to their parents: *Son of man, dig in the wall*.)**

7. There follows, regarding the second abomination:

*And turn thee yet again and thou shalt see greater abominations.... And he said to me: Son of man, dig in the wall. And when I had digged in the wall, behold, a door. And he said to me: Go in and see the wicked abominations which they commit here. And I went in and saw, and behold, every form of creping things and of living creatures, the abomination; and all the idols of the house of Israel were painted on the wall all round about. And seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel and Jechonias the son of Saphan stood in the midst of them that stood before the pictures. And every one had a censer in his hand: and a cloud of smoke went up from the incense. And he said to me: Surely thou seest, O son of man, what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every one in private in his chamber: for they say: the Lord seeth us not, the Lord hath*

*forsaken the earth*. [Ezek 8.6,8-12]

From 'dig in the wall' up to 'painted on the wall all round about', see in the sermon: *Take yourself spices and myrrh-oil*, which is preached on Ash Wednesday.

There follows, *And seventy men of the ancients* , etc. St Jerome's Gloss here says, "We should pray lest the elders of the house of Israel fulfil in the darkness the sacred number seventy, multiplying seven tens, standing in their errors and worshipping the pictures of idols, their vices, and a sacrilegious smoke goes up in opposition to God." Religious of our own day are called 'seventy men', because they ought to have the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit in the perfection of their works. But what do the fools do? They stand in front of pictures, and Jechonias in their midst, who (according to the Interlinear Gloss) "lost the true religion and worshipped idols in the temple of God." The pictures on the wall are images of pride, gluttony and lust in the mind, or the appearance of hypocrisy in religion, or carnal love of parents (and maybe of sons and daughters) in a religious. Thus the creeping things that cry out "Woe! Woe!" represent children and nephews. The abomination of animals represents the uncleanness of fornication. The painted idols are parents and friends. See what pictures some religious of our day adore! And what is worse, 'Jechonias', the abbot or prior, the 'son of Saphan' ('judgement', that is, eternal death) who ought to stop them, is there in the midst of them adoring the same pictures!

*And every one had a censer in his hand*. What is the censer in the hand, but the property of the monastery, given with a view to almsgiving and sacrifice, in the power of the superior? But these associates of Judas, having the traitor's purse, with the thurible of alms and the incense of sacrifice offered for the dead cense their pictures: that is, they give the goods of the monastery, which belong to the poor, to their families and friends. There is no need to go into details. You have surely heard and seen, O son of man, what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, having *grown old in evil days* [cf. Dan 13.52]. They say, *The Lord seeth us not*; because they themselves are in darkness and do not see, they think they are not seen. St Jerome's Gloss says, "If we would only think how the Lord is present, seeing and judging everything, we would hardly ever sin."

**(Against worldly prosperity: *Turn thee again*.)**

8. The third abomination follows. The Lord said to me:

*If thou turn thee again, thou shalt see abominations. And he brought me in by the door of the gate of the Lord's house which looked to the north: and behold, women sat there mourning for Adonis. And he said to me: Surely thou hast seen, O son of man*. [Ezek 8.13-15]

St Jerome's Gloss says that the Hebrew and Syrian name for Adonis is Thammuz. By Thammuz or Adonis we understand worldly prosperity, the lover of Venus and of lust. The weeping women are all those who mourn for lost prosperity. Alas! How many feeble folk today weep for the prosperity they have lost, rather than voluntary poverty! How

often they lose their faith! They are like labourers on the devil's farm; not of the noble blood of Jesus Christ, who commanded them not only to let go what they have, but to rejoice in poverty over the things they have lost.

**(Against those who forget the Lord because of temporal things: *And behold at the door of the temple*.)**

9. There follows, concerning the fourth abomination:

*But turn thee again and thou shalt see greater abominations than these. And behold, at the door of the temple... were about five and twenty men having their backs towards the temple of the Lord and their faces to the east: and they adored towards the rising of the sun. And he said to me: Surely thou hast seen, O son of man*. [Ezek 8.15-17]

To turn one's back on God's temple is to despise the Creator, forget Jesus Christ's death, and put off eternal life. To turn one's face to the east, and worship the rising sun, is to exult in the glory of earthly dignity, to seek that glory, and to worship a man in order to get it.

In the book of Esther, Mardochaeus says against this:

*Lord, thou knowest all things: and thou knowest that it was not out of pride and contempt, or any desire of glory, that I refused to worship the proud Aman. For I would willingly and readily for the salvation of Israel have kissed even the steps of his feet. But I feared lest I should transfer the honour of my God to a man, and lest I should adore any one except my God*. [Esth 13.12-14]

The hapless rich of this world do not behave like this. The Lord says to them in Luke: *Woe to you that are rich; for you have your consolation* [Lk 6.24]. All those who commit these abominations, like the ruler's son at Capharnaum, lie sick unto death with a sickness of the soul. Therefore the ruler is insistent in his prayer, that his son may be freed from sickness and restored to health. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

**(A sermon on the Lord's Nativity: *He who sat on the throne in the gate said*.)**

There follows: *He, having heard that Jesus was come from Judea into Galilee, went to him and prayed him to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death* [Jn 4.47]. Judea means 'confession', and Galilee means 'a wheel' or 'volubility'. So Jesus Christ comes from Judea into Galilee when he comes down from eternal life, wherein is the confession of angelic praise, to the wheel of our volubility.

10. There is a **concordance** to this in Ezekiel, where it says that he who sat on the throne

*spoke to the man that was clothed with linen, and said: Go in between the wheels that are under the cherubims and fill thy hand with the coals of fire that are between the cherubims and pour them out upon the city*. [Ezek 10.2]

The linen represents the glorious body of Jesus Christ, which he took from the virgin earth and put on himself, to cover our nakedness. The Father said to him, *Go in between the wheels*. A wheel, which returns again to the point it started from, stands for human nature; to which was said, *You are earth, and to earth you will return* [cf. Gen 3.19]. The Son of God went in between the wheels when he went down from Judea to Galilee, taking our nature, *being seen upon earth and conversing with men* [cf. Bar 3.38], *in habit found as a man* [Phil 2.7]. They are under the cherubim, because they are made *a little less than the angels* [cf. Ps 8.6]. Thus he filled his hand with the coals of fire, the burning teachings, which are between the cherubim, the two Testaments; and he poured them out upon the city, that is, Holy Church. Alternatively, he pours coals of fire upon the city when he sends the coals of his fear and love upon the soul, destroying the joy of the world and of the flesh, so that it may be warmed and enlightened, to get well again from its sickness. That is why the ruler who knows his son is sick at Capharnaum, should go to him in contrition of heart, and ask with the mouth of confession, that he heal his son, who is said to be at the point of death. Note that these words, at the point of death, are well-chosen. The death of the soul begins with fleshly indulgence and worldly comfort. It ends (though it will never end!) in the damnation of hell.

There follows: *Jesus therefore said to him: Unless you see signs and wonders, you believe not* [Jn 4.48]. The word for ‘wonders’ suggests speaking of what is hereafter, predicting the future from far off. The Lord says something similar to Ezekiel:

*Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious people that hath revolted from me... Thou art among unbelievers and destroyers, and thou dwellest with scorpions... They will not hearken to thee, because they will not hearken to me.* [Ezek 2.3,6; 3.7]

*The ruler saith to him: Lord, come down before that my son die* [Jn 4.49]. The Gloss says that it is as if otherwise he could not save, unless he were present. Therefore the Lord healed by his mere command, to show that he was not absent from the place he was invited to.

And so he says: *Go, thy son liveth* [Jn 4.50]. And in Ezekiel*, When thou wast in thy blood, I said to thee: Live!* [Ezek 16.6]. *Is my will the death of the wicked? says the Lord God, rather than that he be converted and live?* [Ezek 33.11]. *If he considereth and turneth away himself from all his iniquities which he hath wrought, he shall surely live and not die* [Ezek 18.28]. And therefore we sing in the Introit of today’s Mass:

*If thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand it?*

*For with thee there is merciful forgiveness, O God of Israel*. [Ps 129.3-4]

11. The first part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this first clause: *Be strengthened in the Lord*, lest you fall into the infirmity which comes from Capharnaum, *and in the might of his power*, who said, "*Go, thy son liveth*", *put you on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil* [Eph 6.10-11]. Note that whoever wants to be a soldier of God, and put on his armour, and stand firm against the snares of the devil: he must have the horse of good will, the saddle of humility, the stirrups of constancy, the spurs of a two-fold fear, the bridle of temperance, the shield of faith, the breastplate of justice, the helmet of salvation, the spear of charity. Whoever puts on himself this armour, the infirmity of Capharnaum will not overcome him. They are necessary, because our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, the vices of flesh and blood alone, but against principalities and powers, the demons who rule over others, and have power over those who are in the darkness of sins; against the rulers of the world of this darkness, leading worldly folk to ruin, the darkened souls who are cast into the works of darkness which are the abominations spoken of by Ezekiel; against the spirits of wickedness in high places, the wickedness of the spirit which is against what is heavenly. They fight for no small thing, but to take away our heavenly heritage.

Therefore we ask you. Lord Jesus Christ, to free us from the infirmity of Capharnaum, and from the fourfold abomination, so that we may stand fast against the snares of the devil, and be found fit to love with you in the heavenly life. Grant this, you who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen.

[THE SECOND CLAUSE]

**(The theme for a sermon on faith and contemplation: *This was the vision running*.)**

12. There follows, secondly: *The man believed the word that Jesus said to him, and went his way*. [Jn 4.50]

The Gloss says, "He did not go to the ruler’s son, even though he was asked, lest he seem to honour wealth. He promised to go to the centurion’s servant, because he did not despise the man’s nature. In this he destroyed pride, which considers not a man’s nature, but what appears on the outside," and does not honour wealth truly. Whence he says in Ezekiel:

*Their silver shall be cast forth and their gold shall become a dunghill.*

*Their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them*

*in the day of the wrath of the Lord*. [Ezek 7.19]

This can be understood morally, because "The silver of eloquence and the gold of wisdom" will not deliver Tullius and Aristotle in the day of the Lord’s wrath, who says in

Job:

*I will not spare him, nor his mighty words, and framed to make supplication.* [Job 41.3]

Note that it says that he first believed, and then went, because the belief of the heart comes first, and afterwards the going in action.

Whence Ezekiel says:

*This was the vision running to and fro in the midst of the living creatures,*

*a bright fire and lightning going forth from the fire.*

*And the living creatures ran and returned like flashes of lightning*. [Ezek 1.13-14]

The bright fire means faith, which gives light. Whence: *Thy faith hath saved thee* [Mk 10.52], that is, has enlightened you. He asked, "What do you want done for you?" "Master, that I may see the light!" From this fire there comes forth the lightning of good works, and so the living creatures, the saints, go in to contemplation and return to action, because they are unable to be there long, on account of bringing fruit to others; like flashes of lightning, because through them, as they go up to contemplation and stand in good works, the heavenly light is scattered upon others. "Then charity rises wonderfully to the heights, when it draws itself mercifully to the depths of the neighbour; and what in loving-kindness goes down to the lowest place, returns in power to the highest."[1] Therefore the man believed and went.

**(On the descent of humility: *Now descending there*.)**

13. There follows:

*And as he was going down, his servants met him, and they brought word, saying that his son lived*. [Jn 4.51]

Note these three: As he was going down, the servants met him, and the son lived. If you go down, your servants will meet you and your son's life will be announced. Therefore it is good to go down. Whence? and whither? From the mountain to the valley, from pride to humility. In the valley the Lord appeared to Abraham [cf. Gen 18.1]. *The valleys shall abound with corn* [Ps 64.14]. Jeremiah says: *See thy ways in the valley* [Jer 2.23]. Isaiah: *Every valley shall be filled* [Is 40.4; Lk 3.5]. Ezekiel: *They shall be like doves of the valleys* [Ezek 7.16]. Therefore, even as he goes down, the servants meet him. The servants are the five bodily senses, which should serve reason. If you go down, your servants will meet you, that is, they will obey you. If the heart is humble, the bodily senses are obedient. Obedience arises from humility.

**(On obedience: *Out of the midst, as it were the resemblance of amber*; and: *Silvered as the wings of a dove*.)**

Whence Ezekiel: *Out of the midst thereof, that is, out of the midst of the fire, as it were the resemblance of amber* [Ezek 1.4]. The fire is humility, because just as fire humbles what is high and burns up what is hard, so humility bends proud hearts, and recalls hard hearts at the words *"Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return*" [Gen 3.19]. O humility, if you could incline the head of divinity in the womb of the poor little Virgin, what can be so high that you are unable to humble it? From this fire comes the amber of obedience. St Gregory[2] says, "Amber is from gold and silver. When they are mixed, the silver grows in brightness and the gold becomes paler in radiance." The sounding silver is the word of the prelate; the gold is the pure conscience of a good subject; when the prelate's word is joined to it, the word grows brighter by the subject's obedience, and the subject grows paler by the mortification of self-will.

Whence the Psalm says:

*The wings of a dove covered with silver,*

*and the hinder parts of her back with the paleness of gold*. [Ps 67.14]

The dove is the good subject, whose wings are the words of the prelate, which make him fly. At the prelate's word, the subject should at once, in heart and body, fly like a dove. And prelates should take care, because their words should be silvered with the silver of Jesus Christ's humanity, which was mingled with the gold of his divinity. Whence Christ, the mediator between God and man, is signified under the form of amber. While the humanity grew in the glory of majesty, the divinity tempered itself to human eyes from the power of its proper brightness. Let prelates, then, silver their words with the humility of Jesus Christ's humanity, so that they command their subjects kindly and in a friendly manner, prudently and mercifully, because the Lord was not in the wind, the earthquake and the fire; the Lord was in *the whisper of a gentle breeze* [cf. 3(1)Kg 19.11-12]. And so the hinder parts of the subject's back, his will and affection, will be in the paleness of gold, in mortification and purity. We are accustomed to bear burdens upon our backs, and so we should bear the burden of obedience upon the back of patience. The Psalmist says: *Sinners have wrought upon my back* [Ps 128.3]. The wicked prelate overloads the back, the patience, of the good subject. But this abuse will be to his own ruin, and to the latter's glory. Let us say, then: As he was going down, his servants met him. From humility of heart comes the amber, made of silver and gold. Silver stands for the sounding of confession, gold for the cleanness of the bodily senses. See what good things follow from the going down of humility!

**(On the life of the soul and the smell of apples, by which alone men live: They told him that his son lived.)**

14. Then the son's life is announced. They brought word saying that his son lived. Life is

what gives vigour, it is the source of power. The soul is the life of the body, God is the life of the soul, giving vigour and power to the soul, ability and knowledge, so that it lives (and would that we would set ourselves to have the will!). The Natural History of Solinus[3] says that in the region of India there are people who need no food, but live on the scent of wild apples. They travel afar, carrying these apples for their protection, so as to be nourished by their scent. If they should happen to draw in a foul or revolting breath, they are sure to be suffocated.

The scent of the apples is the life of the soul. The apples are the Incarnation and Passion of Jesus Christ, of which the Bride says in Canticles: *Apples new and old I have kept for thee* [Cant 7.13]. The new apples are his birth of the Virgin, the poverty of the Son of God, the sending of a new star, the working of miracles. The old apples are the spitting, blows, gall and vinegar, nails and spear, which have taken away from us our old nature, for as the Apostle says*, our old man is crucified together with him* [Rom 6.6]. Whoever wants to live, should live by the scent of these apples, and in his exile and pilgrimage should carry them with him, so that he does not grow faint in the way, and so that he may be nourished by their scent.

Whence it says in Lamentations:

*The breath of our mouth, Christ the Lord, is taken in our sins:*

*to whom we have said: Under thy shadow we shall live among the Gentiles.* [Lam 4.20]

The prophet says in the Psalm: *I opened my mouth and drew breath* [Ps 118.131]. When you open your mouth in confession and accuse yourself, you draw in the spirit of Jesus Christ, the life of the soul, in the reception of grace. Take care, then, lest you draw in the foul spirit of the world, the stinking spirit of Capharnaum, for you will at once incur not just weakness, but death. Capharnaum means 'field of fatness'. Fatness is usually a cause or mother of corruption, corruption of stench, and stench of death. Open then your mouth, and draw in the spirit of Jesus Christ, who was taken, bound and crucified for our sins. Under the shade of his tree, the Cross (of which Canticles says: *Under the apple-tree I raised thee up* [Cant 8.5]; and: *I sat down under his shadow, whom I desired* [Cant 2.3]) you should rest from the heat of sin, cheating beneath the tree the sun of worldly prosperity. Thus you will live among the Gentiles, the temptations of the flesh and the devil, refreshed by the scent of his Incarnation and Passion.

**(On the fever of lust: *The seventh hour*.)**

15. There follows:

*He asked therefore of them the hour wherein he grew better. And they said to him: Yesterday, at the seventh hour, the fever left him*. [Jn 4.42]

The Gloss says, "He did not doubt the Lord's mercy; but he desired that the divine power

be made known to many by the servants' confession." The seventh hour, they said, a figure of the Holy Spirit, in whom is all salvation.

Fever is a burning, representing the lust of the flesh, by whose heat the heart is stricken and the flesh is corrupted. It says in the book of Judith, that when she entered the presence of Holofernes,

*Forthwith he was caught by his eyes... and his heart was smitten, for he was burning with the desire of her*. [Jdth 10.17; 12.16]

First he is caught by his eyes: and so the prophet prays, *Turn away my eyes*, etc [Ps 118.35]; and in Canticles: *Turn away thy eyes from me, for they have made me flee away* [Cant 6.4]. It says in Genesis: *His mistress cast her eyes on Joseph* [Gen 39.7]. The eyes are the first darts of lust. Secondly, the heart is smitten, and so the fever of lust is inflamed. But so that it may not die by consent of mind or action, it is enlightened at the seventh hour, by the grace of the seven-fold Holy Spirit. Then he and his whole house should believe, that is, with body and soul together, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who has deigned to free the soul from such a wretched fever, and the body from such a miserable pollution of lust.

16. Whence the second part of the Epistle is **concordant** with this second clause:

*Stand, having your loins girt about with truth* [Eph 6.14].

The loins are associated with desire, desire which gives pleasure. This is the cursed fever that reigns in the loins, and thus the Apostle says: *Stand, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of justice*. By doing to each according to his rights, you will be protected by justice as by a breastplate, and you will leave no opening to the enemy. *And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace*, lest he who preaches be in contact with the earth, lest he preach from love of earthly things. *In all things taking the shield of faith* (faith being the shield under which justice is safe) *wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one* (all the assaults of the devil); *and take unto you the helmet of salvation*. The helmet is eternal salvation, the remembrance of which encircles the mind, lest it fail; and the sword of the Spirit, the power given by the Holy Spirit to strike the enemy, *which is the word of God*, that is, the Gospel. Whoever exercises himself and prepares himself in these six, as in six hours, will be delivered from the fever of lust by the sevenfold grace, as at the seventh hour.

Therefore, beloved brothers, let us ask the Lord Jesus Christ to make us come down from the mount of pride, and to extinguish in us the fever of lust, so that with loins girt we may return to health and be able to attain eternal life. May he grant this, who is blessed, to be praised, and glorious for ever and ever. Let every soul freed from fever say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] GREGORY, *Regula Pastoralis*, II,5; PL 77.33

[2] cf. *GLOSSA INTERLINEAREA* on Ezek 1.4

[3] SOLINUS, *Polyhistor*, 65

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost: *The kingdom of heaven is likened*; which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon on the penitent, or on any religious; on contrition and confession: *By the king's command*.)**

1. At that time, Jesus spoke to his disciples this parable: *The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king, who would take an account of his servants*. [Mt 18.23]

It says in Daniel that:

*Then by the king's command Daniel was clothed with purple, and a chain of gold was put about his neck: and it was proclaimed of him that he had power as the third man in the kingdom.* [Dan 5.29]

Let us see what is meant by these four: Daniel, the purple, the chain of gold and the third in the kingdom. Daniel means 'God's cause' or 'God's judgement'. Note that a cause is an impulse of the mind to do something. The cause is what a thing comes from. It is the beginning and the matter of a case: 'cause' when it is proposed, 'judgement' when it is discussed, and 'justice' when it is complete. 'Cause' sounds like 'chaos', the beginning of all things. the 'cause' is the origin of each thing. Daniel stands for the penitent, who from the fear and love of God makes 'cause', 'judgement' and 'justice' regarding himself. These three are the purple, gold chain and third place in the kingdom. He brings his case in contrition, the origin of everything just, and the impulse of the soul towards doing good. He makes his judgement in confession, where he tries and examines himself. He does justice in satisfaction, wherein he gives to each what belongs to him: prayer to God, fasting to himself, and almsdeeds to his neighbour. In these consists satisfaction. Therefore Jesus Christ, the King of kings, commands that Daniel be clothed in purple. Purple is the colour of blood, and it stands for contrition of heart, from which proceeds the blood of tears.

Whence it says in the fourth book of Kings:

*The sun being now up, and shining upon the waters, the Moabites saw the waters over*

*against them red, like blood. And they said: It is the blood of the sword*. [4(2)Kg 3.22-3]

Literally, understand as follows: When the Moabites saw the sun's reflection in the waters opposite them, they thought that they were running with blood, and said: *The enemies have killed each other* [4(2)Kg 3.23]. Morally: when the sun of grace rises upon the mind, the waters (blood-red with tears) come by the way of Edom, the eyes of the penitent. Truly, these waters are the blood of the sword. When the sinner's heart is wounded by the sword of contrition, it pours out tears of blood. It is well said, then: *By the king's command, Daniel was clothed in purple*.

There follows: *And a chain of gold was put about his neck*. Chains are golden circles, hanging from the neck to the breast. The gold chain about the neck is the circle of a pure confession in the penitent's mouth, of which the Lord says in Ezekiel: *I put a chain about thy neck* [Ezek 16.11]. Confession is rightly called a golden chain or circle. *Wisdom reacheth from end to end mightily* [cf. Wisd 8.1]; and the sinner going from first to last sin in the circle of confession, must include everything as he goes round it, as the psalmist did when he said:

*I have gone round, and have offered up in his tabernacle a sacrifice of jubilation*. [Ps 26.6]

(in Holy Church, that is, confession). The Lord speaks of this circle to the devil, in Isaiah:

*I will put a ring in thy nose... and I will turn thee back by the way thou camest*. [Is 37.29]

Note that mortal sin is committed in three ways, the devil's way to the soul, by the devil's temptation, the pleasure of the flesh, and the consent of the spirit. The first two are venial, the third mortal. When in confession (which opposes temptation) the sinner is contrite for the consent of his spirit, and afflicts himself in satisfaction for the pleasure of the flesh: then the Lord puts a ring in the devil's nose (his cunning and craftiness) and turns him back by the way he came. "He cures opposites by opposites".

There follows: *And it was proclaimed of him that he had power as the third man in the kingdom*. The kingdom of Christ is the life of the just man. He said: *My kingdom is not from this world* [cf. Jn 18.36]. The life of the just man consists in the three things mentioned above. The third in Christ's kingdom is the one who rules his life of penitence with satisfaction. Pharao's magicians lacked this third sign (meaning the wise of this world), since they would not make satisfaction for their sins. The true penitent, so as to be a sharer in the heavenly kingdom, takes care to be third in the kingdom of that king spoken of in today's Gospel: *The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king*, etc.

2. Note that there are three things to notice in this Gospel, namely, the remission of the debt by the king, the ingratitude of the wicked servant, and his imprisonment or torture. The first: *The kingdom of heaven is likened*; the second: *When that servant was gone out*; the third: *Then he called him*, etc.

In the Introit of today's Mass is sung: *The Lord says: I think thoughts of peace*; and the Epistle of blessed Paul to the Philippians is read: *I am confident in the Lord Jesus*, which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the three clauses of the Gospel. The first is: *I am confident*; the second: *God is my witness*; the third: *This I pray*. And pay attention to the fact that in today's Gospel Matthew speaks of the wicked servant who would not have mercy on his fellow servant; while by contrast the Apostle longs for everyone in the bowels of Christ, and admonishes them that charity should abound in them. That is why this Epistle is read with this Gospel.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(A theme on the day of judgement: I looked, and thrones were placed.)**

3. Let us say, then: *The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king, who would take an account of his servants*. [Mt 18.23]

This man who is a king is Jesus Christ, man in his humanity, king in his divinity; man in his nativity, king in his passion, wherein he had the regalia proper to a king: crown, purple and sceptre. He had a crown of thorns, a purple robe and a reed as sceptre in his hand, when, bowing the knee before him, they mocked him, saying: *Hail, king of the Jews* [Mt 27.29]. There is a **concordance** to this in Daniel:

*I beheld therefore in the vision of the night,*

*and lo, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven.*

*And he came even to the Ancient of days*. [Dan 7.13]

The clouds represent preachers. Whence, *His going out is from the end of heaven*, etc. [Ps 18.7], who is in every respect equal to the Father, who wished to take an account of his servants. He takes an account when he examines each one's deserts in this world, and will make a stricter audit in the next.

Whence there is a **concordance** to this in Daniel, where he says:

*I beheld till thrones were placed and the Ancient of days sat.*

*His garment was white as snow and the hair of his head like clean wool:*

*his throne like flames of fire: the wheels of it like burning fire.*

*A swift stream of fire issued forth from before him:*

*thousands of thousands ministered to him,*

*and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before him.*

*The judgement sat and the books were opened*. [Dan 7.9-10]

The Gloss says, "The angels and all the elect will accompany the Lord in judgement, and will be God's thrones, wherein he is seated." Thus he says in Matthew*: When the Son of man shall come in his majesty, and all his angels with him* [Mt 25.31], who (as the Gloss says) are the witnesses of human actions, done well or ill under their care.

*And the Ancient of days sat*, namely, the Father. Even though (as the Gloss says) the person of the Son appears in judgement, yet the Father and the Holy Spirit are not absent. The Father is of himself, the Son is of the Father, and whatever belongs to him is imputed to him from whom he is. He is termed 'ancient', being a severe and true judge. 'Ancient' suggests time long past, as where it says in John, *Before Abraham was made, I am* [Jn 8.58]. He who sits, and is of ancient days, is God; the character of the eternal judge is shown forth: he is depicted as an old man, to indicate the maturity of his sentence.

*His garment was white as snow*. The Saviour, when transfigured on the mountain, and putting on the glory of the divine majesty, was seen in white garments. In the judgement, too, his vesture will be white, manifesting the purity and sincerity of his judgement, having no favouritism in judging. As Peter says, *In very deed, I perceive that God is not a respecter of persons* [Ac 10.34]. Note that it says, 'white as snow'. Snow comes from the clouds, and Ambrose[1] says that icy blasts solidify water in the cloud, and snow falls from the broken air. Snow is white and cold. In the judgement there will be whiteness as to the blessed, cold as to the damned. White in "*Come, ye blessed*"; cold in "*Depart, ye cursed*."

*And the hair of his head like clean wool*. Regarding this, see the first clause of the Gospel, *I am the good shepherd* [Easter II].

*His throne like flames of fire*. The Gloss of Origen[2] says that the throne of God consists of monks and hermits and others, who strive to serve God in by living in one place, and do not run about hither and thither, so that God sits in their quiet hearts. They are well called 'flames of fire', because they are ablaze with love of God and neighbour, and in desire for their heavenly home. A flame is found in a furnace, stirred up by the blast of the bellows. The heart of the just man is a furnace of fire, in which the bellows of contrition and confession stirs up the flame of a double charity. Whence the Psalm says: *Who makest thy angels spirits: and thy ministers a burning fire* [Ps 103.4]. These angel-messengers are just men, who are 'spirits' in that they savour nothing carnal or earthly; they are 'a burning fire' in that they love God and their neighbour.

*The wheels of it like burning fire*. The wheels represent the swiftness of judgement of which the Lord says in the prophet Malachi;

*I will come to you in judgement and will be a speedy witness against sorcerers and adulterers and false swearers and them that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widows and the fatherless: and oppress the stranger and have not feared me, saith the Lord of hosts*. [Mal 3.5]

*A swift stream of fire issued forth from before him, a forceful current*. The stream represents the perpetuity of punishment, the fire the severity of judgement. The swiftness indicates the sudden downfall of sinners into hell.

*Thousands of thousands*, etc. The Psalm says, *The chariot of God is attended by ten thousands*, etc. [Ps 67.18]. The angels have a two-old duty, according to Gregory[3] , to stand ready and to minister. Those who do not go out to announce to men, stand ready. Those who come to fulfil the office of messengers minister, yet do not withdraw from their contemplation. Because those who minister are more numerous than those who chiefly stand ready, the number of those standing is defined, while the number of ministers is indefinite.

*The judgement sat and the books were opened*. 'Judgement' means 'the Court'; the books are the consciences and particular works of either sort, good or ill, laid open to everyone. The good book is that of the living; the evil book is in the hand of the accuser, the vengeful enemy, called in the Apocalypse, The accuser of our brethren [Apoc 12.10]. In the same book it says:

*The books were opened; and another book was opened, which was the book of life. And the dead were judged by those things which were written in the books, according to their works.* [Apoc 20.12]

Therefore it is well said: *The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king, that would take account of his servants*.

4. There follows:

*And when he had begun to take the account, one was brought to him thast owed him ten thousand talents*. [Mt 18.24]

The number ten suggests the Ten Commandments, the thousand suggests the perfection of the Gospel. Every man owes Jesus Christ ten thousand talents, the observance of the Law and the Gospel. Whence Solomon says, *Fear God and keep his commandments* [Eccles 12.13]. The commandments are as it were hand-written. The Ten Commandments were written by the finger of God; the Gospel mandates were given to the apostles by the hand of Jesus Christ. Worthy indeed to be observed are the things given by God's hand, the things for whose observance every man is created.

**(A theme for an allegorical and a moral sermon on the statue of Nabuchodonosor: *Thou, O king*.)**

5. There follows:

*And as he had not wherewith to pay it, his lord commanded that he should be sold, and his wife and children and all that he had, and payment be made*. [Mt 18.25]

Let us see what is meant by the works, wife and children. The sinner's 'wife' is worldly cupidity. It is the statue of Nabuchodonosor, of which Daniel says:

*Thou, O king, sawest, and behold as it were a great statue, (whose) head was of fine gold, but the breast and the arms of silver, and the belly and the thighs of brass: and the legs of iron, the feet part of iron and part of clay.* [Dan 2.31-33]

Let us see what is meant by the gold, silver, brass, iron and clay. First allegorically, then morally.

This statue represents Holy Church, which in the apostles has a head of gold. Whence in Canticles: *His head is as the finest gold* [Cant 5.11]. The Church has arms and breast, wherein is the greater strength, of silver: in the time of the martyrs, who fought bravely in the fray. Whence the Bridegroom says to the Church in Canticles: *We will make thee chains of gold, inlaid with silver* [Cant 1.10]. The word indicates chains made of gold and silver links. The Church's chains are humility and poverty, which marked the Apostolic age; and which in the time of the martyrs were made even more beautiful by being 'inlaid with silver', reddened with their blood. Silver and gold, the martyrs' blood in which they washed their robes, together with the humility and poverty of the Apostles: what a wonderful beauty they display to our eyes!

Again, the Church has brass and iron in confessors who have destroyed the wickedness of heresy by the sound of their preaching. Whence Moses says in Deuteronomy, *Aser's shoe shall be iron and brass* [Dt 33.25]. Aser means 'blessed', and he represents the blessed choir of confessors, who, shod with the brass of preaching and the iron of invincible endurance, have trodden upon serpents and scorpions: namely, heretics and schismatics. Whence the Lord says by Jeremiah:

*I have made thee this day a fortified city and a pillar of iron and a wall of brass, over all the land, to the kings of Juda, to the princes thereof and to the priests and to the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee and shall not prevail: for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee*. [Jer 1.18-19]

Note these three things: a city, a pillar and a wall. The fortified city represents unity, which truly fortifies and defends. The pillar of iron is fraternal charity, which upholds. The wall of brass is unconquerable patience and unflagging preaching. The holy confessors Jerome, Augustine, Hilary, and all the other Doctors of the Church, had these qualities,

and so they overcame the fabricators of lies.

Again, the poor little Church of Christ, storm-stricken amid the refuse of the world, has as it were as her feet iron and clay, in clergy and laity alike. The iron stands for avarice, the clay for lust. See what limbs the Body of Christ, the Church, has: avaricious and lustful people who are not the Church of Christ but the Synagogue of Satan.

6. Morally. From the world's beginning there have been two cities, the Church and Babylon. This statue represents the world, the city of Babylon, the synagogue of Satan, which is well-called a statue, being as it were an idol. It has a mouth, and does not speak, because it has the frog of avarice in its mouth. It has eyes, and does not see, because the filth of lust blinds it. It has ears, and does not hear, because like a serpent it puts one ear to the ground, and blocks the other with its tail*, lest it hear the voice of the charmer* [cf. Ps 113.6]. Gold represents worldly wisdom, silver is eloquence, resounding brass is vainglory, iron is obstinacy, clay is love of temporal things. A little stone, Jesus Christ, strikes this statue; which, as Daniel says, was cut out of a mountain without hands, being born of the blessed Virgin without the intervention of a man.

*And it struck the statue upon the feet thereof that were of iron and clay and broke them in pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver and the gold broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff... carried away by the wind: and there was no place found for them*. [Dan 2.34-35]

So Christ in his first coming struck the statue of the world, though not entirely; in the day of judgement it will be entirely destroyed. Whence the Apocalypse says:

*That great harlot Babylon is fallen, is fallen;*

*which made the world drunk with the wine of her fornication*. [Apoc 14.8]

**(Against the prelates of the Church: *The statue*.)**

7. Alternatively. This statue is the prelate of the Church, lifted up and exalted in temporalities. This is the statue of Baal, 'master' or 'devourer'. See the idol lifted up in the Lord's house, devouring everything. So it says in Daniel that:

*The Babylonians had an idol called Bel: and there were spent upon him every day twelve great measures of fine flour (the whitest sort, according to a special measure) and forty sheep and sixty vessels of wine*.

See how much is the one who will be devoured by the devil devours!

*The king also worshipped him and went every day to adore him; but Daniel adored his God*. [Dan 14.23]

Every day we perceive this being done in Christ's Church. At least there should be done what Peter did, when it tells in the Acts of the Apostles that:

*Cornelius came to meet him and falling at his feet adored. But Peter lifted him up, saying: Arise; I myself also am a man, just like you*. [Ac 10.25-26]

The king said to Daniel:

*Why dost thou not adore Bel? And he answered and said to him: Because I do not worship idols made with hands, but the living God that created heaven and earth and hath power over all flesh. And the king said to him: Doth not Bel seem to thee a living god? Seest thou not how much he eateth and drinketh every day?* [Dan 14.3-5]

How much indeed, alas! And the poor cry out with empty bellies, and naked, at the gate! Because he eats a lot, he lives!

*Then Daniel smiled and said: O king, be not deceived,*

*or this is but clay within* (the greedy and the lustful),

*and brass without* (the proud and the avaricious),

*neither hath he eaten at any time the food*

*which does not perish, but remains into eternal life* [cf. Jn 6.27]

The head of this idol, or statue, is of gold, representing the foolish wisdom of the flesh, which is folly before God. The silver is eloquence, the Egyptian frog. Of these two, the Lord says by Ezekiel:

*Thou tookest thy beautiful vessels, of my gold and my silver which I gave thee,*

*and thou madest thee images of men and hast committed fornication with them*. [Ezek 16.17]

From the gold of wisdom and the silver of eloquence, which the Lord gives to the Church's prelate to be beautiful vessels in which he may receive the grace of the Holy Spirit and offer it to others, he makes for himself a wretched idol, when he corrupts the grace of understanding and eloquence with wickedness of life; and he commits fornication with them when he seeks vainglory from them in the world's brothel.

Again, in brass we understand riches, which make a big noise. He says, *They have called their names in their lands* [cf. Ps 48.12]; and Ezekiel: *Thy name went forth among*

*the nations* [Ezek 16.14], not among the angels. Yet it is not the name of the purple-clad rich man, but that of the ulcered beggar Lazarus, which is written in the Gospel.

Iron stands for power, which crushes the poor. But*, Lord, Thou hast broken the teeth of sinners* [Ps 2.8]; and, *The Lord shall break the grinders of the lions* [Ps 57.7]. This is the beast Daniel speaks of, terrible and wonderful and exceeding strong. It had great iron teeth, eating and breaking in pieces and treading down the rest with its feet [Dan 7.7].

Again, the clay stands for his miserable flesh, which when the stone comes, the hardness of death, will be struck down and crushed. Then the gold of wisdom, the silver of eloquence, the brass of riches, and the iron of power will be broken to pieces together, reduced to nothing and scattered by the wind: for the flesh is given to worms, riches to family, and the soul to demons; and so nothing will be found in its place. So it is well said in the Gospel, *The Lord commanded that he should be sold, and his wife and children*, because (as the Gloss says) he is bound to eternal punishment for the cupidity of the world and the flesh, and for evil deeds, as it were his wife and children. May he graciously free us from these, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

**(On the humility of the penitent and the measure of satisfaction: *That servant, falling down*.)**

8. *But that servant falling down, besought him, saying: Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.* [Mt 18.26]

See what the sinner should do, while he is alive, lest after death he be led to the punishment of eternal death, with his wife and children. Note these three: falling down, besought, and, I will pay thee all; these stand for contrition, confession and satisfaction, by which all sins are remitted. To fall down means on one’s face: he falls on his face, who is truly contrite and recognises that he is earth. Whence:

*All they that go down to the earth shall fall before thee*. [Ps 21.30]

Before thee, he says: not before Nabuchodonosor’s statue, of which Daniel says:

*All the people fell down and adored the gold statue which king Nabuchodonosor had set up in the plain of Dura*, [Dan 3.7,1]

(meaning, ‘beauty’ or ‘speech’). The gold statue is the deceitful glory of this world, which is established by the devil in outward beauty and in speech full of false promises. He shows the beauty of glory, he promises it, and so all nations fall from true glory and adore that which is transitory, and in it adore the devil. Whence it says in Matthew:

*All these will I give thee, if falling down thou wilt adore me*. [Mt 4.9]

He who would beg for pardon should not fall down before the statue, but before Jesus; with that servant of whom it is said: *But that servant falling down*.

There follows: *he besought him*. To beseech is to ask something humbly and devoutly. Confession should be humble and devout: humble, bowed to the ground, in its dejection and accusation; devout in the prompt will to make amends: then he can say: *Have patience with me*. The Apostle says of this:

*Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and patience and longsuffering? Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance?* [Rom 2.4]

He who despises these riches will always be poor and wretched.

*And I will pay thee all*. He pays all who makes amends for all, so that penalty is proportionate to fault. *Bring forth fruits worthy of penance* [Lk 3.8], he says. In the book of Josue it says that: *The lot of Juda passeth on to Sina* [cf. Jos 15.1,3], meaning ‘measure’. A ‘measure’ is whatever is defined by weight, capacity, length or mind. True satisfaction contains these four: the weight of sorrow, the capacity of love (which holds all), the length of final perseverance, and humility in the mind. Where all these come together, mercy is immediate.

Whence it follows: *The Lord of that servant being moved with pity, let him go and forgave him the debt*.[Mt 18.27]

Note that God’s mercy does three things: it purifies the soul from sin, it bestows the riches of grace, it amasses the delights of heavenly joys. The first afflicts the heart in contrition; the second disposes it to love; the third infuses the heart with heavenly dew, the hope of heavenly good things. This is clear from the three-fold meaning of the word: in Latin ‘*misericordia*’. It belongs to the ‘first mercy’ to bestow a sorry heart. The ‘second mercy’ puts away the hardness of the heart. The ‘third mercy’ wonderfully waters the heart with sweetness. Being moved with pity for the servant, with this triple mercy, he forgave him the debt.

Whence the Introit of today’s Mass is especially and most appropriately **concordant** with this passage, as in it this merciful Lord says:

*I think thoughts of peace and not of affliction*; that is: *the Lord of that servant had pity*;

*you shall call upon me*; that is: the servant, falling down, besought him;

*and I will hear you*; that is: he let him go;

*and I will bring back your captivity*; that is: *and forgave him all the debt*. [Jer 29.11,12,14]

9. The first part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this first clause:

*I am confident in the Lord Jesus, that he who hath begun a good work in you*:

to fall down in contrition, beseech in confession, and repay all in satisfaction;

*will perfect it unto the day of Christ Jesus*;

that is, until the end of life, when God will be seen.

*As it is meet for me to think this for you all*,

that is, to want it, so that I pray you will do it. See that my confidence is not in vain. He explains the reason:

*for that I have you in my heart*, (not just on my lips),

*and in my bands*, (by compassion),

*and in the defence* (against attackers),

*and confirmation* (of the weak in the teaching)

*of the gospel I desire you to be all partakers of my joy*,

that in the future you may be sharers and partakers in the eternal joy.

We ask you, then, Lord Jesus Christ, that we may be found fit to attain that joy; and that you who are the chief corner-stone will break the statue of our cupidity, and forgive the debt of our iniquity. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(The theme for a sermon on the last judgement: *The fingers of a hand*.)**

10. There follows, secondly:

*But when that servant was gone out, he found one of his fellow servants that owed him an hundred pence: and laying hold of him, he throttled him, saying: Pay what thou owest*. [Mt 18.28]

When the wicked servant had gone out from the remembrance of the divine mercy, which had forgiven him his debt, he would not have mercy on his fellow servant. The

servant would have done well to have mercy on his fellow servant, seeing that the Lord had had pity on him. As great as the difference there is between ten thousand talents and a hundred pence, so great (and far greater) is the difference between the sin whereby we offend God, and the sin whereby our neighbour offends us. If God, then, the Lord of all creation, forgives you so much, why can you not forgive so little to your neighbour? He who forgets the mercy he shown to him, will have mercy on no-one else. Thus the going out of the servant indicates his forgetfulness. Whence, in Genesis:

*And Cain said to Abel his brother: Let us go forth abroad. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and slew him*. [Gen 4.8]

Cain means 'possession'. Eve said '*I have gotten a man by the Lord*.' He represents the avaricious man who, when he goes out from the presence of the divine mercy, seizes Abel ('strife') and chokes him, the poor man afflicted by the struggle of poverty.

Morally. Cain kills Abel, the possession of riches kills the struggle of penitence; and the strife of eternal death follows that possession, which like Cain is born first. Whence Daniel said to Balthassar:

*Thou hast not humbled thy heart, but hast lifted thyself up against the Lord of heaven... and the God who hath thy breath in his hand and all thy ways thou hast not glorified. Wherefore he hath sent the part of a hand which hath written all that is set down: Mane: that is, he hath numbered; Thecel: that is, he hath weighed; Phares: that is, he hath divided*. [Dan 5.22-28]

In the judgement there will be these three things: the destruction of sins, the censure of good deeds not done, the carrying out of the sentence. Then the Babylonian kingdom will be divided, the synagogue of sinners cut off from the kingdom of the just, and it will be given to the Medes and Persians, the demons who will utterly choke it: *He laid hold and throttled him*. 'Throttle' is related to 'throat', the channel whereby we emit our voice. Whoever constricts the throat seeks to take away both voice and life. The life of the poor is his means of life, as the blood is the life of the living creature. When you take away a poor man's livelihood, you draw his blood, you squeeze his throat: and so you in turn will be throttled by the devil.

**(A theme on the furnace of Babylon and its meaning.)**

11. There follows:

*And his fellow servant falling down, besought him, saying: Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he paid the debt.* [Mt 18.29-30]

O wicked servant! Using the very same words with which you begged the Lord, and he forgave you, your fellow servant besought you: and you refused to forgive, but cast him

in prison! Believe me: the time will come when Solomon's proverb will be fulfilled:

*He that stoppeth his ear against the cry of the poor*

*shall also cry himself and shall not be heard*. [Prov 21.13]

The prison is this world, the Babylonian furnace. So there is a **concordance** in Daniel, where the servants of Nabuchodonosor

*ceased not to heat the furnace with brimstone and tow and pitch and dry sticks*. [Dan 3.46]

Brimstone is the bone of olive-trees; tow is used to seal up the cracks in ships; pitch comes from the pine-tree; and the dry sticks are the prunings of the vine. Brimstone represents avarice, which lacks the oil of mercy, containing only the dregs of money. When you extract the oil, you leave the dregs. Take the oil of mercy from money, and what remains goes in the fire of eternal death. The tow is vain-glory, which swiftly turns to ashes. The pitch, which emits a foul smoke, is lust which soils the soul and destroys reputation. The dry sticks are pride, since the proud are cut off from the true vine, Jesus Christ.

With these four kinds of tinder the furnace of Babylon is enkindled, and all this world is burnt up, wherein are the three children, Sidrach, Misach and Abdenago.

*But, the angel of the Lord... drove the flame of fire out of the furnace, and made the midst of the furnace like the blowings of a wind bringing dew. And the fire touched them not at all* [Dan 3.49-50].

Three virtues are represented by these three children, and whoever has them will come unscathed out of the world's furnace. Sidrach ('my beautiful one') is chastity; whence in Canticles:

*Thou art beautiful, with inward and outward chastity, daughter of Jerusalem*. [cf. Cant 6.3]

And in Genesis:

*Joseph is a growing son and comely to behold*. [Gen 49.22]

And again:

*Rachel was well favoured, and of a beautiful countenance*. [Gen 29.17]

Misach ('laughter') is patience, which laughs in tribulation. Abdenago ('silent servant') is obedience, which serves whole-heartedly, and remains silent as to the word of self-will.

Whoever has these three virtues will be set free from the fiery furnace, the burning vices of this world, by the Angel of great counsel and the wind of dew, the grace of the Holy Spirit.

There follows:

*Now his fellow servants seeing what was done, were very much grieved, and they came and told their lord what was done*. [Mt 18.31]

The fellow servants, according to the Interlinear Gloss, are preachers of the Gospel, or the angels who bear back to God the deeds of men. Whence the Angel said to Daniel:

*From the first day that thou didst set thy heart to understand, to afflict thyself in the sight of thy God, thy words have been heard: and I am come for thy words*. [Dan 10.12]

The Gloss says, "After you began to invoke God’s mercy with tears, fasting and prayer, I took occasion to enter the presence of God to pray for you."

**(On the nature of those four who live only of the four elements: *God is my witness*.)**

12. The second part of the Epistle is concordant to this second clause:

*For God is my witness, how I long after you in the bowels of Jesus Christ*,[Phil 1.8]

that is, in the intimate love of Christ, that you may be loved by him; or that by that affection you may love God and neighbour, whereby Christ loved you, giving his life for you. The wicked servant did not long for this, since he throttled his fellow servant. A ‘witness’ sees what is the case. Blessed Paul is a good witness, seeing what has been done by Jesus Christ in himself and in others. ‘Bowels’ means the region surrounding the heart, the seat of life, thus indicating that which contains life and soul. The ‘bowels’ of Jesus Christ means the charity with which he has loved us, and in which our soul lives. Wherever death may be, in the bowels of Jesus Christ there is only life.

Natural History tells us that there are only four creatures which live of (one of) the four elements alone. The alec, a small fish, lives only on water; the chameleon lives only on air; the salamander on fire; and the mole on earth alone. Solinus[4] says that "the chameleon takes neither food nor drink, but lives simply on the nourishment it draws in from the air. It is a four-footed animal, slow-moving, almost like the movement of a tortoise, with a rough body and variable colour which changes in a moment, so that it becomes of the same colour as whatever thing it is next to. There are two colours it cannot copy, red and white, but it easily assumes the others. It hides in winter, and comes out in spring. If it is killed by anyone, though destroyed it destroys its conqueror, for if he eat even a little of it, he dies thereof. But if a carrion-crow (or other crow-like bird, which derives its name from its croaking voice) eats of it, it has a protection to heal

it, nature lending a hand. For when it realises that it is afflicted, it eats a laurel leaf and recovers its health." Again, the salamander (as it is called) has power against burning. If it creeps into a tree, it poisons all the fruit; and not only is it unharmed by fire, it extinguishes it. This is the creature called ‘stellio’, of which Solomon says in Proverbs:

*The stellio which supporteth itself on hands, and dwelleth in kings’ houses*. [Prov 30.28]

It is called ‘stellio’ on account of its colouring, having a body marked with bright spots like stars. Again, the mole is condemned to perpetual blindness. It is without eyes, and always digs in the earth. Because we have undertaken to treat of charity, which is the life of the soul, if we can find in the nature of these creatures anything to build it up, we will set it down here. Of their poison and malice, we will not treat for the present.

Note that charity rests mainly on four things: compunction of heart, contemplation of glory, love of neighbour and remembrance of one’s own lowliness. The alec, the little fish, represents the humble penitent, who lives solely on the water of tears. So he says with the prophet, Every night I will water my couch with my tears [Ps 6.7]: that is, for every sin which brings eternal night I will weep and afflict my body with penance, so that it may bring forth *the green grass bearing seed, and fruit-trees bearing fruit according to their kind* [cf. Gen 1.12]. Regarding this, see the sermon: *In the beginning God created* [Septuagesima].

**(For religious or penitents on the weeping of penitence: *I Daniel mourned*.)**

13. And that the humble penitent lives only on the water of tears, there is an obvious **concordance** where Daniel says:

*I, Daniel, mourned the days of three weeks, and I ate no desirable bread, and neither flesh nor wine entered into my mouth; neither was I anointed with ointment till the days of three weeks were accomplished*. [Dan 10.2-3]

Note that from too much weeping three things happen: the eye is dimmed, the head aches and the face grows haggard. Truly, in this way the penitent’s eye, that used to plunder the soul, is dimmed lest it *look on a woman to lust after her* [cf. Mt 5.28], and shut *lest death enter at the windows* [cf. Jer 9.21]. His head ( that is, his mind) aches for the things he has done, so that he says with the Sunamite’s son, in the fourth book of Kings, *My head acheth, my head acheth* [4(2) Kg 4.19]. The repetition of the words indicates the intensity of the pain. His face grows haggard from the chastisement of the flesh, so that he says, *My flesh and my heart hath fainted away* [Ps 72.26], meaning, the richness of my flesh and the pride of my heart. These are the three weeks that the penitent mourns; or else: he weeps for the days of three weeks because he has offended the holy Trinity in three ways, in heart, word and deed.

I ate no desirable bread, he says. The Gloss explains, "He abstained from delicate foods, which we should do all the more in the time of fasting. Those who make use of

what is unlawful should abstain even from what is lawful." Alternatively, the 'desirable bread' means worldly pomp, which pretends to be something when it is nothing, but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel [Prov 20.17], eternal punishment. Job says: His bread in his belly shall be turned into the gall of asps within him [Job 20.14]. The penitent does not eat this bread, but rather says (as in the Psalm): I did eat ashes like bread [Ps 101.10]. The Gloss says, "I used to eat ashes, the left-overs of sin, like bread: that is, I consumed them in being sorry, because even the least traces of sin should be consumed by penitence. And I mingled my drink with weeping."

So he adds, *Neither flesh nor wine entered my mouth*, meaning the concupiscence of the flesh and the glory of the world. The flesh is dearly loved, and the vine swiftly fills the veins with blood. Neither was I anointed with ointment. There is a **concordance** to this in the prophet Amos, where he says:

*Woe to you... that eat the lambs out of the flock and the calves out of the midst of the herd;*

*that drink wine in bowls and are anointed with the best ointments*. [Am 6.4,6]

The penitent does all these things, until he fulfils the days of three weeks; that is, until he makes complete satisfaction for his sins, and receives forgiveness from the holy Trinity.

**(On humility: *Under the Lord's feet*; and: *Over the head of the Cherubim*; and on the same subject, concerning the claws of birds.)**

14. The chameleon represents the contemplative man, who lives on air alone- that is, on the sweetness of contemplation. He says with the Apostle, *Our conversation is in heaven* [Phil 3.20]; and with Job, *My soul rather chooseth hanging* [Job 7.15]. 'Hanging' means raising one's vision to the Lord. The just man is lifted from earthly things by the thread of divine love, and hangs in the air by the sweetness of contemplation. He as it were becomes wholly air, having nothing of the flesh, of carnality. So it was said of John the Baptist that he was *a voice crying in the desert* [Mt 3.3; Jn 1.23]. A voice is air, and John was air, not flesh, because what he savoured was entirely heavenly, not fleshly. So it says in Exodus that: Under the Lord's feet as it were a work of sapphire stone [Ex 24.10]. The minds of the just are placed like a footstool beneath the feet (that is, the humanity) of Jesus Christ. So it is said that *Mary sat at the Lord's feet* [cf. Lk 10.39]; and again, the women came up and took hold of his feet [Mt 28.9]; and in Deuteronomy, *They that approach to his feet shall receive of his doctrine* [Dt 33.3]. Sapphire is the colour of air. The minds of the just, subject in faith and humility to the humanity of Jesus Christ, are like the work of sapphire stone.

Note these three: work, stone and sapphire. 'Work' refers to the labour of penance, of which Solomon says in Proverbs:

*Prepare thy work without, and diligently till thy ground:*

*that afterwards thou mayest build thy house*. [Prov 24.27]

Your ‘ground’ is your life, your ‘house’ is your conscience. ‘Stone’ refers to constancy of mind, so that Zechariah says: In one stone there are seven eyes [cf. Zech 3.9], the gifts of seven-fold grace in the constant man. ‘Sapphire’ refers to the sweetness of contemplation.

Whence it says in Ezekiel:

*over the heads of the cherubims as it were the sapphire stone*. [Ezek 10.1]

"Over the heads of the cherubim" means over the mind of the just, which are full of that knowledge which alone deserves the name, and makes us knowledgeable. Note that what Ezekiel in the beginning calls ‘living creatures’, he here calls ‘cherubim’, thus referring to the living creatures by the name of angels, because they were winged. By this we are to know that they are not described as having the feet or beaks of birds, but only their wings. Just men do not have curved claws, like birds, to seize and tear; but only the wings of divine contemplation. To indicate this, nature has given man flat nails, not curved.

15. Natural History says that birds with hooked claws, when they see that their chicks are able to fly, strike them and throw them out of their nests; and when their chicks are fully grown they have no care for them. That is how avaricious and pitiless folk behave, who see the poor and weak grow a little stronger (and, far worse, when they are still in their weakness) and cast them out of their own house. But upon the head of the cherubim is a sapphire stone, because the blessedness of contemplation adorns and enlightens the minds of the just.

The salamander represents the charitable man, who lives on the fire of charity alone. Whence Ecclesiasticus says:

*Elias the prophet stood up, as a fire: and his words burnt like a torch*. [Ecclus 48.1]

The words and works of the just man burn with charity; so that he is rightly called a ‘stellio’, being bright with stars, shining with good works. So Solomon says of him that he supporteth himself on hands, (on his works, as to his neighbour) *and dwelleth in kings’ houses* (by contemplation, as to God).

The mole represents the despised and solitary man, who lives only on earth, because he knows himself to be earth, and a sinner, not unmindful of the curse: "You are earth, and to earth you will return." He is content in the blindness of this exile with earth alone, because he does not eat the flesh of other creatures, that is, he does not condemn or judge sinners, but considers only his own sins, in the bitterness of his soul, "longing that all should be in the bowels of Jesus Christ."

Let us humbly pray him, then, dearest brothers, to gather us up in the bowels of his charity, and to make us live on the water of compunction, the air of contemplation, the fire of charity and the earth of humility; whereby we may be able to attain him who is Life. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(On the question whether sins forgiven return or not: *Then he called*.)**

16. There follows, thirdly:

*Then his lord called him; and said to him: Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all the debt, because thou besoughtest me: shouldst thou not then have had compassion also on thy fellow servant, even as I had compassion on thee? And his lord being angry, delivered him to the torturers until he paid all the debt*. [Mt 18.32-33]

From this Gospel reading it is clear that forgiven sins can return. On this matter, I want to set down what I have found in the '*Sentences*'.[5]

"The question is, whether forgiven sins return. The solution of this question is obscure and perplexing, some asserting and others denying that sins once forgiven can afterwards be subject again to penalty. Those who say that forgiven sins can return rely upon the following testimonies:

AMBROSE: Forgive one another, if one has sinned against another, otherwise God will find again what he has forgiven. If anyone shall be despised in these matters, assuredly the penitence by which mercy is declared will be recalled; as is read in the Gospel of the wicked servant who was caught acting unmercifully to his fellow servant.

RABANUS: God gave the wicked servant up to the torturers until he should repay all he owed, because not only the sins a man commits after Baptism are reckoned as punishable, but even original sins which are forgiven him in Baptism.

GREGORY: It is established from the Gospel teaching that if we do not forgive from our hearts what has been done against us, there will be demanded of us again even what we rejoiced to have had forgiven us by penitence.

AUGUSTINE: God says: *Forgive, and you will be forgiven*. But I forgave first. Forgive, or afterwards if you do not forgive I will call you back, and return to you what I had forgiven.

And: Those who forget the divine kindness and want to avenge their injuries, not only will they not deserve pardon for future sins, but even those past, which they believed forgiven, will return to demand vengeance.

BEDE: *I will return to my house*, etc. This verse is to be feared, not explained, lest the guilt we believed extinguished in us, by our idle carelessness return to oppress us.

And: Whoever after Baptism is beset either by heretical wickedness or worldly cupidity, will soon be cast down into the depths of vice.

AUGUSTINE: The Lord most clearly teaches that forgiven sins return, where fraternal charity is lacking, in the Gospel of the servant who sought the forgiveness of his debt, yet would not forgive the debt of his fellow servant.

These authorities support those who say forgiven sins return, if they are repeated.

On the other hand we have these arguments: If anyone is punished again for a sin he has repented of and received pardon, it does not seem just. If he is punished for what he did wrong, and did not correct, it is clearly just. But if what was remitted is required of him, it is unjust, or at least the justice is not clear. It seems that God judges him twice in the same matter, and he is 'tried twice for the same offence', which is against Scripture. Yet it can be replied that he is not tried twice, and God does not judge him twice, for the same thing. This would be the case only if after appropriate satisfaction, and sufficient punishment, he were to be punished again. But he has not made appropriate and sufficient satisfaction, if he has not persevered in it. He ought to remember the yoke of sin, not so as to do it again, but so as to beware of it. He should not forget all God's retributions, which are as many as the sins forgiven. He should reckon God's gifts as numerous as his sins, and give thanks for them even to the end. But because the ungrateful man returned like a dog to his vomit, he destroyed the good he had done and recalled his forgiven sin, so that God would impute to him the sin he previously forgave when he humbled himself, now that he has shown himself proud and ungrateful.

Yet because it seems inappropriate that sins once forgiven should be imputed again, it seems to some people that no-one should be punished by God for sins that have once been forgiven. The reason for saying that what has been forgiven returns and is imputed, is that because of his ingratitude the man is once again made guilty and a sinner, as he was before. What was forgiven is required again of him, because being ungrateful for the forgiveness he has received, he becomes as guilty as he was before.

Approved teachers favour both sides of the question; I therefore do not take either side, but leave it to the judgement of the careful reader, adding that it seems to me a safe and salutary principle to eat the crumbs under the masters' table."

17. The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this third clause:

*And this I pray, that your charity may more and more abound in knowledge and in all understanding*. [Phil 1.9]

Charity abounds, and grows into knowledge, so that a man may know how to prove and discern not only between evil and good, but also between good and better. So he adds, *That you may approve the better things, that you may be sincere* (without any corruption as to yourselves) *and without offence* (as to others) *unto the day of Christ*: that is, to the day of death or of judgement. The wicked servant did not keep to this, because he was not sincere before God, who had forgiven his debt, nor without offence towards his fellow servant, whom he throttled and put in prison; therefore in the day of Christ he himself will be throttled by the torturers, the demons. *Filled with the fruit of Justice* (works which are the fruit of justice), *through Jesus Christ* (not through your own strength), *unto the glory and praise of God* [Phil 1.9], that is, as going to pass thereby into eternal glory, wherein you will praise God; or, that you may be the glory and praise of God, that it may be said of you: *God is wonderful in his saints* [Ps 67.36], wonderfully working and making to work.

Dearest brothers, let us humbly beg him to forgive us our past sins, and give us grace not to fall back again; to grant that we may forgive men from our hearts, so that we may fitly come to his glory, in which he is glorious and to be praised for ever and ever. Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] AMBROSE, *Hexaemeron*, ii,4,16; PL 14.165

[2] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Dan 7.9 (ref. there is to GREGORY)

[3] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Dan 7.10

[4] SOLINUS, *Polyhistor*, 4

[5] PETER LOMBARD, *Sententiae* IV, dist 22.1

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost: *The Pharisees going*, which is divided into two clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon on the preacher or prelate of the Church, and of the riches of sinners, and the threefold trumpet of gathering: *Let there be a trumpet in thy throat*.)**

1. At that time: *The Pharisees going, consulted among themselves how to ensnare Jesus in his speech*. [Mt 22.15]

Hosea says:

*Let there be a trumpet in thy throat, like an eagle upon the house of the Lord: because they have transgressed my covenant and have violated my law*. [Hos 8.1]

Let us see the meaning of these four: the throat, the trumpet, the eagle and the house. Note that (as the book of Numbers says [cf. Num f.9-10]) the trumpet summons to three things: war, a banquet, and a festival. The trumpet is preaching, so that the prophet Amos asks:

*Shall the trumpet sound in a city and the people not be afraid?* [Am 3.6]

It is a sign of great obstinacy if the people hear the trumpet of preaching, warning of eternal death, and are unafraid. They are like the deaf asp, putting one ear to earthly things, and blocking the other with the tail of carnal desire, *lest they hear the voice of the wondrous-sounding trumpet* [cf Ps 57.5-6].

Of people like this the prophet Micah says to preachers:

*Declare ye it not in Geth, weep ye not with tears:*

*in the house of dust sprinkle yourselves with dust*. [Mic 1.10]

Geth means ‘wine-press’, and it stands for the proud and avaricious of this world, who like wine-presses squeeze and oppress the poor and needy. The same prophet says of them:

*You that violently pluck off their skins from them and their flesh from their bones:*

*who have eaten the flesh of my people and have flayed their skin from off them:*

*and have broken their bones*. [Mic 3.2-3]

We should not sound the trumpet of preaching for these, nor shed tears for them: no trumpet can soften the hardness of their hearts, no tears put out the fire of avarice. The same prophet says of them:

*As yet there is a fire in the house of the wicked,*

*the treasures of iniquity and a scant measure full of wrath.*

*Shall I* (no!) *justify wicked balances and the deceitful weights of the bag?* [Mic 6.10-11]

This refers to the malice of misers, who use one scale for selling and another for buying.

There follows: *In the house of dust sprinkle yourselves with dust*: that is, you preachers, in the house of the poor penitent and contrite in spirit, who knows he is dust, show the example of your own humility. The Lord says that the poor have the Gospel preached to them [cf. Mt 11.5], not the rich; the humble, not the proud. Water runs off a swelling.

The trumpet, then, is preaching, summoning to war against wickedness; of which the prophet Joel says:

*I the Lord have spoken: Proclaim ye this among the nations:*

*prepare war, rouse up the strong:*

*let them come, let all men of war come up.*

*Cut your ploughshares into swords and your spades into spears.*

*Let the weak say: I am strong*. [Joel 3.8-10]

When the Lord, by inward inspiration, speaks in his preachers, then they proclaim among the Gentiles (those who live gently!): Prepare war, etc. We prepare war by putting away our vices first, and then taking up the struggle against the spirits of

wickedness who are against what is heavenly. Whoever opposes, feels this. He rouses the strong, those who firmly intend not to fall back. The men of war go up when the five bodily senses, formerly weak and enfeebling the soul, but now like strong warriors, rise up in chaste and chastened behaviour, who used to go down into the depths of vice. He turns ploughshares into swords, and spades into spears, who turns the tongue of detraction (which used to cut the lives of others like a plough) into the swords of confession and self-accusation; and turns the spades of earthly care and self-love into the spears of charity. Then he who was weak and feeble can say: I am strong, and have the power to go up against the foe and stand in battle in the day of the Lord.

**(For penitents or religious, on the way of doing penance, and the restoration of the lost: *Fear not, ye beasts of the fields*.)**

2. Again, the trumpet of preaching summons to the banquet of penitence, of which the Lord says through Joel:

*Fear not, ye beasts of the fields: for the beautiful places of the wilderness are sprung,*

*for the tree hath brought forth its fruit:*

*the fig tree and the vine have yielded their strength.*

*And you, O children of Sion, rejoice and be joyful in the Lord your God:*

*because he hath given you a teacher of justice,*

*and he will make the early and the latter rain to come down to you as in the beginning.*

*And the floors shall be filled with wheat, and the presses shall overflow with wine and oil.*

*And I will restore to you the years which the locust and the bruchus and the mildew*

*and the palmer-worm have eaten*.[Joel 2.22-25]

The beasts of the fields are converted sinners, who return from the far-off fields of estrangement to the mercy of God the Father. The Psalm says of them: *In it shall thy animals dwell* [Ps 67.11], that is, in Holy Church, the region of reconciliation.

To these, lest they despair over the greatness of their sins, there is said: *Fear not*: *for the beautiful places of the wilderness are sprung*. The wilderness is a wild place, uncultivated; it stands for penitence, which nowadays is rarely truly cultivated and dwelt in. The beautiful places of the wilderness are penitent folk, who spring up in contrition. Just as the bud is the beginning of the flower, so these are always starting again, and renewing themselves day by day. Fear not, you beasts of the field: you will be as

beautiful as they are.

So there follows: *For the tree hath brought forth its fruit*. Note these three: the tree, the fig, and the vine. There are three organs in a man from which action proceeds, whether inwardly or outwardly. These are the heart, the tongue and the hand. The heart of the penitent is like a tree that brings forth the fruit of contrition, of which Isaiah says: *This is all the fruit, that the sin thereof should be taken away* [Is 27.9]. Contrition is called 'all the fruit', because it takes away all sin, as long as one has the firm intention of confessing. So it immediately goes on:

*When he shall have made all the stones of the altar as burnt stones broken in pieces.*

*The groves and temples shall not stand*. [Is 27.9]

The 'high altar' is where victims are burnt. On the altar of pride, lust and avarice (which set themselves up high), the unhappy soul is burnt. This is the altar of Baal (meaning 'master' or 'devourer'), well in accord with the etymology of 'altar'. The stones of the altar are sins of pride, lust and avarice; which the one confessing should lay before the priest like burnt stones broken in pieces; he should confess them clearly and distinctly, sin and circumstance alike. Then the groves of imagination and the temples of sinful pleasure will not stand. Thus the tree brings forth its fruit.

There follows: *The fig tree and the vine have yielded their strength*. The fruitful fig represents the tongue, fruitful in words. Round this fig-tree we should put the dung of confession of sin, so that it may give it its strength (confession). The vine is the hand, which stretches out its fingers like branches. The ten fingers should be properly joined together. The penitent should stretch out the hand of action to the ten commandments, which are fittingly joined. On the first table the commandments regarding the love of God are written; on the second, those regarding our neighbour. When they are joined together, they are very right and proper indeed.

Therefore, you sinners (who are children of Sion, the Church) rejoice in heart and be joyful in work, in the Lord your God and not in other things, because he has given you a teacher of justice, the Spirit of grace who teaches you to do justice to yourselves, and will make the early and the latter rain to come down to you. The Gloss says, "The early rain is faith, and the latter is perfection of work. Alternatively, the early rain is the knowledge of God which is given after faith, and the latter rain is the fulness of that knowledge."

*And the floors shall be filled with wheat*, etc. The 'floors' mean minds, where the chaff of sin is separated, and so the wheat of good works abounds; and through the pressure they sustain, the oil of mercy and the wine of consolation also abound.

*And I will restore to you the years*, etc. The locust has long spear-like legs; the bruchus is all mouth; the mildew destroys the sheaves and the palmer-worm eats the leaves; its

bite causes itching in the flesh. The locust stands for pride, the bruchus for gluttony, the mildew for anger and envy, and the palmer-worm for lust. These are what devour our good works; but when we turn back to penitence, the Lord restores to us the years, the richness of good works, because the good works we did in charity (but which died through subsequent sin) are brought back to life in penitence, to whose banquet the trumpet calls us.

3. Again, it summons to the festival of glory. Whence the prophet Nahum says:

*Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings and that preacheth peace.*

*O Juda, keep thy festivals and pay thy vows to the Lord,*

*for Belial shall no more pass through thee again: he is utterly cut off*. [Nah 1.15]

He who brings the good tidings of the festival of heavenly glory, preaches peace indeed. He who preaches it is not in the vale of sensual pleasure, into which the dregs drain down, but upon the mountains of an exalted life, where stand the Lord's feet. He says, *O Juda, keep thy festivals*, etc. Juda means 'confessing', and he represents the penitent who, having here celebrated the banquet of penitence, passes to the celebration of the festival of heavenly glory, in which he safely pays his vows to the Lord, singing with the angels, and not fearing that 'Belial' (the sting of the flesh, or the devil's temptation) will trouble him further, for he is utterly cut off. Whence Joel says:

*Jerusalem shall be holy and strangers shall pass through it no more*. [Joel 3.17]

The Gloss says: "After the day of Judgement, Jerusalem will consist of angels and men, and will be without any contamination (which it previously contracted from the mingling of the wicked). The 'stranger' (the devil, or any evil thought) will have no way in the just, who have God's peace."

Let us say, then: *Let there be a trumpet in thy throat*. O preacher, let there be a trumpet of preaching in your 'throat'- that is, in your mind and not just in your mouth, so that you may be like an eagle over the house of the Lord, the holy Church or the faithful soul. (Regarding the eagle, see the Gospel: When Jesus went into Jerusalem [Pentecost XIV, first clause]).

There follows: *Because they have transgressed my covenant and have violated my law*. This is why the preacher should have the trumpet in his throat, and fly like an eagle over the Lord's house: because sinners have broken the covenant they made with the Lord in Baptism, and violated the law, as to the letter and as to grace. They are worse than the Pharisees, who broke the written law, in which it says: *You shall not tempt the Lord your God*. These quite intentionally tempted the Lord of the law. Whence the Gospel says: The Pharisees going, etc.

4. There are two things to note in this Gospel, namely the wicked cunning of the Pharisees, and the wisdom of Jesus Christ. The first: *The pharisees going*; the second: *Jesus knowing their wickedness*, etc.

On this and the following Sunday the twelve prophets are read, and we sing in the Introit of the Mass: *All ye nations*. The Epistle of blessed Paul to the Philippians is read: *Be followers of me*, which we will divide into two parts and **concord** with the aforesaid clauses of the Gospel. The first: Be followers; the second: *Our conversation is in heaven*. This Epistle is read with this Gospel because in the Gospel Matthew speaks of the pharisees and the Herodians (which means, 'glory of the skin'), and of the denarius imprinted with Caesar's likeness; and the Apostle speaks in the Epistle of the enemies of Christ's cross, whose glory is their shame, and of our body, which will be imprinted with the glory of the supreme king.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(Against the prelates of the Church: *The Pharisees going*.)**

5. Let us say, then: *The pharisees going, consulted among themselves how to ensnare Jesus in his speech*. [Mt 22.15]

'Pharisee' means 'divided', and they represent proud and carnal prelates of the Church, of whom Hosea says: Their banquet is separated, they have gone astray by fornication [Hos 4.18]. The banquet of the saints is to weep not only for their own sins, but for those of others; to sigh for the things of eternity; to savour the sweetness of inner beatitude. The banquet of the Pharisees, who have gone astray by fornication, is separated from this banquet. Whence the Lord says of them, again in Hosea:

*I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel:*

*the fornications of Ephraim there. Israel is defiled.*

*And thou also, O Juda, set thee a harvest,*

*when I shall bring back the depravity of my people*. [Hos 6.10-11]

I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel, namely in the Church: the fornications of Ephraim (meaning 'fruiting'), of those religious who ought to bear fruit, but by avarice and other sins commit idolatry. And Israel, the prelate, is contaminated by these sins.

So Hosea says again:

*Thy calf, O Samaria, is cast off: my wrath is kindled against them.*

*How long will they be incapable of being cleansed? For itself also is of Israel*. [Hos 8.5-6]

Samaria is the Church, whose calf, lustful and wanton, going with out-stretched neck and puffed-out belly, is cast off from the Lord. Hosea says again of it, *Israel hath gone astray like a wanton heifer* [Hos 4.16]. And so, as Jeremiah says,

*Egypt is like a fair and beautiful heifer:*

*there shall come from the north one that shall goad her*, [Jer 46.20]

the devil with the goad of avarice and lust. Therefore the Lord will not only be angry with such prelates, he will burn with fury. How long will the people be incapable of being cleansed of wantonness and lust and the like? It is as if to say, the people cannot be cleansed from these, because it is itself of Israel, because they see these things in their own leaders. Thus Israel is defiled; but you, Juda (you simple layfolk), even though religious and prelates are like that, prepare yourself a harvest of good works, and do not regard those people, until I turn again your captivity, your enduring sins, *as a stream in the south* [Ps 125.4], by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Again, Hosea says of these Pharisees:

*Their heart is divided: now they shall perish;*

*he shall break down their idols, he shall destroy their altars.* [Hos 10.2]

Whoever has a divided heart will go to ruin. So the third book of Kings tells how Jeroboam (whose name means ‘division’) was destroyed, he and his house *even to him that pisseth against the wall* [cf. 3(1)Kg 14.10]. The Lord Almighty will himself break the idols of the Pharisees, their hypocrisy and boasting, and destroy their altars, their showy riches and lustful flesh, on which they sacrifice to the devil.

Of these, then, it is said: *The pharisees going*. Where were they going? The wanton wife in Hosea says:

*I will go after my lovers that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax,*

*my oil and my drink*. [Hos 2.5]

The wanton wife is any soul who commits fornication spiritually, who goes after her lovers when she follows her senses. ‘Bread’ means worldly pleasure and prosperity. So Job says: *Bread becometh abominable to him in his life* [Job 33.20]. ‘Water’ means lust, as in Job:

*He sleepeth under the shadow, in the covert of the reed, and in moist places*.[Job 40.16]

'Wool' is the appearance of innocence, as Leviticus says: *White in the skin is leprosy* [cf. Lev 13.3]. 'Flax' is subtlety in deceit, as in Isaiah:

*They shall be confounded that wrought in flax, combing and weaving fine linen*. [Is 19.9]

Flax is soft and smooth. 'Oil' is flattery: *Let not the oil of the sinner fatten my head* [Ps 140.5], my mind; let me not get big-headed from false flattery. That is how the Pharisees went.

**(Against their avarice and lust: *Woe to you, apostate children*.)**

6. So, *the pharisees going, consulted among themselves*. Isaiah says of them:

*Woe to you, apostate children, saith the Lord, that you would take counsel, and not of me:*

*and would begin a web, and not by my spirit, that you might add sin upon sin.*

*Who walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth:*

*hoping for help in the strength of Pharao and trusting in the shadow of Egypt.*

*And the strength of Pharao shall be to your confusion:*

*and the confidence of the shadow of Egypt to your shame*. [Is 30.1-3]

The *apostate children* are those of whom Hosea says:

*Ephraim* (the laity) *hath committed fornication, Israel* (the clergy) *is defiled*.

*They will not set their thoughts to return to their God:*

*for the spirit of fornication is in the midst of them,*

*and they have not known the Lord.* [Hos 5.3-4]

*That you would take counsel, and not of me*. So the Lord says in Hosea:

*They have reigned, but not by me: they have been princes, and I knew not*. [Hos 8.4]

*And would begin a web*. Whence Hosea:

*The calf of Samaria shall be turned to spiders' webs.*

*For they shall sow wind and reap a whirlwind.* [Hos 8.6-7]

Just as a spider's web is scattered and dissolved by the wind, so the calf, the wantonness of the clergy, is brought to nothing. Just as the wind creates a blast which stirs up the dust, so the love of temporal things is like a wind that brings about the whirlwind of eternal damnation.

*And not by my spirit*. Isaiah says:

*They provoked to wrath and afflicted the spirit of his Holy One:*

*and he was turned to be their enemy.* [Is 63.10]

Micah says:

*Is the spirit of the Lord straitened, or are these his thoughts?*

*Are not my words good to him that walked uprightly?*

*But my people, on the contrary, are risen up as an enemy.* [Mic 2.7-8]

The Lord's spirit is straitened when the sinner withdraws from grace; yet it is widened towards penitents, when grace is poured into them.

*That you might add sin upon sin*. So Hosea says:

*There is no truth, and there is no mercy, and there is no knowledge of God in the land.*

*Cursing and lying and killing and theft and adultery have overflowed:*

*and blood hath touched blood*. [Hos 4.1-2]

Because sin is added to sin, new sins are added to old. As the banks of a river hold it in, to prevent flooding, so the fear of God and worldly shame should be like two banks preventing the flood of sin. It has become very little among the clergy, for: *There is no fear of God before their eyes* [cf. Ps 13.3; 35.2; Rom 3.18]; and: *They have a harlot's forehead, they would not blush* [cf. Jer 3.3]

*Who walk to go down into Egypt*, the covetousness of the world, of which Amos says:

*Strike the hinges and let the lintels be shook:*

*for there is covetousness in the head of them all.*[Am 9.1]

The hinges on which the door turns means the use of the keys by prelates, to exclude or admit to the Church. The lintels mean the excellence of the priestly dignity, which has fallen into ruin through the fire of cupidity and pride.

*And have not asked at my mouth*. Amos says

*The Lord God doth nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets*. [Am 3.7]

*Hoping for help in the strength of Pharao*, sensuality. Against this, Jeremiah says:

*Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,*

*and let not the strong man glory in his strength,*

*and let not the rich man glory in his riches:*

*but let him that glorieth glory in this,*

*that he understandeth and knoweth me,*

*for I am the Lord that exercise mercy and judgement and justice in the earth:*

*for these things please me, saith the Lord*. [Jer 9.23-24]

**(Against the powerful of the world: *The Lord prepared an ivy-plant*.)**

*And trusting in the shadow of Egypt*, worldly power, which is like a passing shadow,

7. There is a **concordance** to this in the prophet Jonah, where it says that *The Lord prepared ivy* (or according to the Hebrew a gourd, which quickly grows up and withers),

*and it came up over the head of Jonas, to be a shadow over his head and to cover him (for he was fatigued): and Jonas was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm, when the morning arose on the following day: and it struck the gourd and it withered. And when the sun was risen, the Lord commanded a hot and burning wind. And the sun beat on the head of Jonas, and he broiled with the heat: and he desired for his soul that he might die*. [Jon 4.6-8]

The gourd represents worldly power, whose fruit is edible when it is ripe, but later becomes dry as wood. So it is with sin. At first it is pleasurable, but this passes. Afterwards there remains the stain of guilt in the soul, and if repentance does not follow, eternal death will result. But when morning arises, the dawn of grace, this gourd dries up and, when it is gnawed by the worm of conscience, all worldly glory is destroyed, and is reckoned as nothing. This is ‘on the following day’, the day after the one of which Job said: Cursed be the day wherein I was born [Job 3.3]. Then the sun of God’s love beats on the head, the mind, not just enlightening it, but hurting it to bring repentance. Then he desires for his ‘soul’ (here meaning his animal nature) that it die. You will find this treated also in the second clause of: *In the beginning God created* [Septagesima].

*And the strength of Pharao shall be to your confusion: and the confidence of the shadow of Egypt to your shame*. Hosea says:

*Ephraim saw his sickness, and Juda his band.*

*And Ephraim went to the Assyrian and sent to the avenging king:*

*and he shall not be able to heal you:*

*neither shall he be able to take of the band from you*. [Hos 5.13]

This is what Isaiah speaks of: *For Egypt shall help in vain* [Is 30.7]. Neither Assyria (the devil) nor Egypt (the world) can take away man’s weakness and sickness. So Job says:

*The eyes of the wicked shall decay: and the way to escape shall fail them*.[Job 11.20]

And Horace[1] : "Neither house nor estate, nor heap of bronze or gold, will draw the fever from a sick lord’s body."

8. There follows: *To ensnare Jesus in his speech*. In the same way Pharisees today try to catch out preachers of Jesus in their words to the people. They behave like Amasias, of whom it is said in the prophet Amos that:

*Amasias, the priest of Bethel, sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying: Amos hath rebelled against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus saith Amos: Jeroboam shall die by the sword and Israel shall be carried away captive out of their own land. And Amasias said to Amos: Thou seer, go, flee away into the land of Juda: and eat bread there and prophesy there*. [Am 7.10-12]

Our modern Pharisees say the same to preachers who rebuke their evil-doing, and complain to their superiors. Let him who hears, hear; and let him who understands, understand!

There follows: *And they sent to him their disciples with the Herodians* [Mt 22.16], referring to Herod's troops who were in Jerusalem at that time. The Gloss says that there was a disturbance among the people, with some saying that taxes should be paid for the maintenance of public order, since the Romans enforced it for everyone. The Pharisees, on the contrary, maintained that the people of God were under no obligation, since he freed them from tithes etc., which the law imposes under human legislation.

The followers of the Pharisees are appropriately associated with the Herodians, since those who follow the way of separation, which cuts them off from true glory, are joined to the false and empty glory which passes away. There is a **concordance** to this in Hosea:

*Ephraim hath flown away like a bird: their glory (hath flown away )*

*from the birth and from the womb and from the conception.* [Hos 9.11]

There are many today who, as long as they lack fine feathers (being poor and lowly), rest in the nest of humility; but when they acquire wings and feathers (riches and dignities) fly away in pride. They glory in their wings, when they ought to attend to their wretchedness in conception, upbringing and education. Hosea also says: *The wind hath bound them up in its wings* [Hos 4.19]. These wings are understanding and affection. Understanding flies across the field of truth, the latter flies by discernment of what is good; but both bind the spirit of vainglory.

There follows: *Master, we know that thou art a true speaker*. A 'master' is one of greater status. They term 'master' one whom they honour, who opens the secret of his heart simply, and wants to have them as his followers. *A true speaker, and teachest the way of God in truth*. The Psalm says: *Direct me in thy truth, and teach me* [Ps 24.5]. Direct me to flee error, and to live rightly and properly, as truth demands, and teach me truth itself. *Neither carest thou for any man*. They tried to trick him into saying that God should be feared more than Caesar, and the tribute should not be paid. Then he would appear to be a trouble-maker. Thou dost not regard the person of men. As Habbakuk says

*Thy eyes are too pure to behold evil, and thou canst not look on iniquity*.[Hab 1.13]

'Person' here implies individuality. *Tell us therefore what thou dost think: is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?[*Mt 22.17] This question will be answered in the following sections.

**(On the belly-god: *Be imitators of me*.)**

9. The first part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this first clause: *Brethren, be followers of me* [Phil 3.17].

Even though I am not present, follow those who are like me, and observe them who walk

so as you have our model: meaning, carefully note those who follow the example of my life. Peter says: *Being made a pattern of the flock, from the heart* [1Pt 5.3]. Blessed is that prelate whose example and life can instruct those who are astray.

*For many walk... that they are enemies of the cross of Christ* [Phil 3.18], meaning the Pharisees. The Apostle wept over their loss: *Whose end is destruction*, eternal punishment, *and whose God is their belly*. Scripture often speaks by similes, so that what cannot be recognised in the thing itself, may be recognised in something similar to it. Thus the belly is compared to God, when it says, *Whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame*. It is to gods that people build temples, set up altars, ordain ministers to serve, sacrifice cattle, burn incense. To the belly-god, the temple is the kitchen, the altar is the table, the ministers are cooks, the sacrificed cattle are cooked meats, and the smoke of incense is the tasty smell! These temples are not built in Jerusalem, but in Babylon, because their god is their belly, and their glory will be to their shame. It is he, the prince of cooks, who destroyed the walls of Jerusalem, took away the vessels of the Lord to the house of the king of Babylon, and made the temple vessels into palace plate; and, to speak more truly, to make the vessels of the Lord's table into kitchen crockery.

The Apostle says: *The temple of God is holy, which you are* [1Cor 3.17]. In this temple, the vessels are hearts, which are vessels of the divine temple when they please God by being full of virtues. They become 'palace plate' when they are concerned to please some human power; and they become 'kitchen crockery' when he who formerly served sobriety becomes a slave to gluttony.

So Jeremiah says: *They that were nourished on crocus have embraced the dung* [Lam 4.5]. The crocus grows in the East, and is used for colouring and flavouring. They are 'nourished on crocus' who at the beginning of their conversion are fed on the inner flavour of virtue, and coloured outwardly with the example of good works. But those who in this way were nourished on crocus embrace dung, when after works of piety and continence the care of the belly calls them back; and it sometimes happens that those who lived sober lives in their own homes before their conversion, afterwards become gluttons in the monastery. The belly-god takes pleasure in the sacrifices of various dishes, it bends its ear to rumours, it is roused by all kinds of taste, it is soothed by gossip rather than by prayer, it enjoys idleness, and takes pleasure in sleep. It has monks, canons and other disciples who serve it obediently, all those who live idle and slack lives in the Church, who do not seek secret prayer but the idle chatter of lazy people. Among these there is heard not the sobbing and sighing of a contrite heart, but laughing and cackling and the belching of engorged bellies. These are the sort of people who go and take counsel- *into which let not my soul go* [cf. Gen 49.6].

So, dearest brothers, let us ask the Lord Jesus Christ not to separate us by the divisiveness of the Pharisees, but to confirm us in the teaching of his truth, to guard us from the sin of greed, and so be found fit to come to the banquet of eternal life. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(The theme for a sermon against hypocrites, and on the knowledge of God by which he sees all things: *Jesus knowing their wickedness*.)**

10. There follows, secondly:

*But Jesus knowing their wickedness, said: Why do you tempt me, ye hypocrites?* [Mt 22.18]

He knew their wickedness, because he has knowledge of all things, and nothing can be hidden from him or escape him. So he says in the prophet Amos:

*Though they go down even to hell, thence shall my hand bring them out:*

*and though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down.*

*And though they be hid in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them away from thence:*

*and though they hide themselves from my eyes in the depth of the sea,*

*there will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them*. [Am 9.2-3]

Why, then, do you tempt me, you hypocrites? Isaiah says: *Everyone is a hypocrite and wicked, and every mouth hath spoken folly* [Is 9.17]. Show me the coin of the tribute, he said; referring to the coin with which the tribute was paid, having on it the image of Caesar. And they offered him a penny, worth ten '*nummi*'. *And Jesus saith to them: Whose image and superscription is this? They say to him: Caesar's*. Note these three: the penny, the image and the superscription.

Just as a penny is marked with the king's image, so our soul is marked with the image of the Holy Trinity. As the psalm says: *The light of thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us* [Ps 4.7]. The Gloss says, "O Lord, the light of your countenance, the light of grace, whereby your image is renewed in us," and we are made like to you, "is signed upon us, being impressed upon our reason, the higher power of the soul, whereby we are made like to you; that light is impressed upon us like a seal on wax." "Our reason receives the countenance of God, because just as someone is recognised by their face, so God is recognised by the mirror of reason." This reason is deformed by human sin, which makes a man unlike God, but it is restored by the grace of Christ. So the Apostle says: *Be renewed in the spirit of your mind* [Eph 4.23]. Thus the grace whereby the created image is renewed is here called light.

**(On the threefold image of God: *Show me the coin of tribute*.)**

Note that the image is three-fold: of likeness, of creation (in which man is created, namely reason), and of restoration, by which the created image is restored, namely the grace of God which is infused into the mind to be renewed. The image of likeness is that according to which man was made in the image and likeness of the whole Trinity. By memory he is like the Father, by understanding like the Son, by love like the Holy Spirit. So Augustine[2] says, "Let me remember you, understand you, and love you." Man was made in the image and likeness of God [cf. Gen 1.26-27]: his image in the understanding of truth, his likeness in love of virtue. The light of God's countenance is the grace of justification, whereby the created image is imprinted. This light is the whole and true good of man, whereby he is marked like a penny with the king's image. That is why the Lord adds in this Gospel: *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's*, etc. It is as if he said: "As you give back to Caesar his image, so give back your soul to God, enlightened and signed with the light of his countenance."

**(The theme for a sermon on purity of soul: *I saw, and behold a candlestick*.)**

11. There is a **concordance** to this in the prophet Zechariah:

*I have looked, and, behold, a candlestick all of gold, and its lamp upon the top of it: and the seven lights thereof upon it: and seven funnels for the lights that were upon the top thereof. And two olive-trees over it: one upon the right side of the lamp and the other upon the left side thereof*. [Zech 4.2-3]

Let us see the moral significance of these five: the candlestick, the lamp, the lights, the funnels and the olive-trees.

The candlestick and the penny, the lamp and the image, have the same meaning. The candlestick is the soul, which is said to be all of gold, because it is made in the image and likeness of God. So Ecclesiasticus says: God created man of the earth, and made him after his own image [Ecclus 17.1], so that he might live and know, and have memory, understanding and will. Hence: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart*, etc., that is, with all your understanding, will and memory. Just as the Son is of the Father, and the Holy Spirit is of both, so the will is of the understanding, and the memory is of both, and the soul cannot be complete without these three; nor can one stand entire without the others, with respect to beatitude. And just as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are not three Gods but one God, having three persons; so the understanding soul, the willing soul and the remembering soul are not three souls, but one soul having three powers, wherein it wonderfully bears the image of God. With these, being the more excellent, we are commanded to love the Creator, that in the same degree that he is known and loved, he is always held in memory. The knowledge of God is not enough, if the will is not in his love; nor are these two, unless memory is added, in which God ever abides in the soul that knows and loves him. For just as there is not a moment in which man does not enjoy or benefit from the goodness of God, so he should always be present in the memory. Man is also made in God's image, that just as God is charity, good, just, kind and merciful; so man should have charity, and be good,

just, etc. So: *I looked, and, behold, a candlestick all of gold, and its lamp upon the top of it*.

The lamp is the infusion of grace, whereby the soul is enlightened. So Job says of the just man, enlightened by this lamp:

*The simplicity of the just man is laughed to scorn.*

*The lamp, despised in the thoughts of the rich, is ready for the time appointed*. [Job 12.4-5]

Gregory[3] says, "The simplicity of the just is called a lamp, and it is despised. It is a lamp, because it shines inwardly in the conscience. It is despised, because it is reckoned cheap by carnal minds, and as fatuous by the duplicitous." They regard as dead those who they think do not live carnally like themselves. The appointed time for the despised lamp is the predestined day of the last Judgement, whereon it will be shown with what great power every just soul shines forth, who now is despised.

**(On the seven lamps and the seven funnels, which are the seven beatitudes, and the seven words spoken by the Lord on the Cross: *The seven lights thereof*. Against those who hate their brothers: *For three crimes of Edom*.)**

12. *And the seven lights thereof upon it: and seven funnels whereby the oil is poured into the lamps*. Note that the seven lamps are the seven Beatitudes, and the seven funnels are the seven words spoken by Christ upon the cross; which we shall **concord** each to one another:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*. [Mt 5.3; Lk 23.34]

*Blessed are the meek; for they shall possess the land.*

*Amen, I say to thee: This day thou shalt be with me in paradise*. [Mt 5.4; Lk 23.43]

*Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.*

*Woman, behold thy son. After that he saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother*. [Mt 5.5; Jn 19.26-7]

*Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice; for they shall have their fill.*

*Eli, Eli, lamma sabachthani? That is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* [Mt

5.6; 27.46]

*Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.*

*I thirst!* [Mt 5.7; Jn 19.28]

*Blessed are the clean of heart; for they shall see God.*

*It is consummated!* [Mt 5.8; Jn 19.30]

*Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.*

*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit*. [Mt 5.9; Lk 23.46]

He who is endowed with poverty of spirit can truly pray with Jesus Christ for those who persecute him, saying: *Father, forgive them*, etc. He who is humble in spirit forgives the one who offends him, and prays for him. Edom (the proud sinner) does just the opposite, as the Lord says in the prophet Amos:

*For three crimes of Edom, and for four, I will not convert him:*

*because he hath pursued his brother with the sword and hath cast of all pity*

*and hath carried on his fury and hath kept his wrath to the end.*

*I will send a fire into Theman: and it shall devour the houses of Bosra*. [Am 1.11-12]

The first sin is to think evil, the second to consent to it, the third to carry it out in deed, the fourth to be impenitent. He who sins in the first three ways, if he repents, God will convert him to the countenance of his mercy; but if he does not repent, he turns the face of his mercy from him. The Gloss says, "Edom is the same person as Esau and Seir. He persecuted Jacob, so that for fear of him he fled into Mesopotamia, and he did not show mercy towards him. The hatred that was in their father was maintained by his descendants, the Idumaeans, against the sons of Jacob; so that when they went out of Egypt, they would not grant them passage into the Holy Land, thus violating mercy, as though they did not recognise them as brothers." All those who hate their brothers behave like this, and they are not poor in spirit, and therefore God will send the fire of hell upon Theman (meaning ‘the south’), all those who become dissolute in time of worldly prosperity; and it will devour the houses of Bosra, (meaning ‘fortified’), those who fortify themselves with excuses, so as to remain in their sins.

Morally. Edom means ‘bloody’, and it represents our flesh, which takes pleasure in the blood of gluttony and lust. This persecutes its brother Jacob (our spirit) with the sword of concupiscence; and wants to violate the mercy due to him from God. So the latter prays

to the Lord, saying (as in Genesis):

*Deliver me from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am greatly afraid of him:*

*lest perhaps he come, and kill the mother with the children.* [Gen 32.11]

The spirit fears the flesh, and already prays to be delivered from the hand of its concupiscence; for if it gives consent, it will kill the mother with the children, the reason with its affections, or indeed the soul itself with its good works.

**(The theme for a sermon against the avaricious: *Lift up your eyes and see*.)**

13. Again, he who is meek, who neither offers nor is affected by insults, neither giving nor taking scandal, is able to hear with the good thief- a true confessor- the words: This day you will be with me in paradise, that land of the living which the meek possess. The covetous will not possess this land; like savage beasts they tear their heart in pursuit of gain, and scandalise others as they grab. So they will never hear the gentle whisper: Today you will be with me in paradise; but the thunder of the divine curse: *Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire* [Mt 25.41]. Of such, it says in Zechariah that the angel said:

*Lift up thy eyes and see what this is that goeth forth. And I said: What is it? And he saith: This is a vessel going forth. And he said: This is their eye in all the earth. And behold, a talent of lead was carried: and, behold, a woman sitting in the midst of the vessel. And he said: This is wickedness. And he cast her into the midst of the vessel and cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof. And I lifted up my eyes and looked: and, behold, there came out two women, and wind was in their wings, and they had wings like the wings of a kite: and they lifted up the vessel betwen the earth and the heaven. And I said to the angel that spoke in me: Whither do these carry the vessel? And he said: that a house may be built for it in the land of Senaar.* [Zech 5.5-11]

The vessel is avarice, whose mouth is never shut, but always gapes wide for temporal things. This is the eye in all the earth, because everyone knows and recognises avarice, and has eyes for it. The companion of avarice is the lump of lead, stuffed in its mouth, eternal punishment which can neither be swallowed nor spat out.

The two women are robbery and theft. Robbery is found in the strong, theft in the weak. They are said to have ‘the wings of a kite’, ready to pounce. The kite appears a gentle bird as it flies, yet it is the most rapacious, and preys on domestic fowl. It represents the proud robber. This vessel is lifted up between heaven and earth, because the covetous man has chosen his place neither in heaven with the angels, nor on earth with men, but in the air, like the traitor Judas and the demons. These women do not let the miser go until they set him in the land of Sennaar, the stinking place which is hell (Sennaar means ‘stench’).

**(On the protection of God: *The Lord is good and comforting*.)**

14. Again, he who mourns for his own sins or those of his neighbour, or for the wretchedness of this exile, or the delay of the kingdom, is comforted by the Lord who comforted his own mother as she mourned his Passion, saying: *Woman, behold thy son*. So the prophet Nahum says of him: *The Lord is good and giveth strength in the day of trouble and knoweth them that hope in him* [Nah 1.7]; and he says in Zechariah:

*I will be to it a wall of fire round about: and I will be in glory in the midst thereof*. [Zech 2.5]

And Exodus says: *A dew lay round about the camp* [Ex 16.13]. Christ is a wall of fire defending his own, burning up their enemies yet refreshing them in the midst with glory.

**(On the threefold justice: "*He who hungers and thirsts*")**

15. Again, he who has hunger and thirst for justice, renders to everyone what is due to him, namely, love for God and for his neighbour, and for himself affliction for the things he has done. This triple justice is expressed in the three phrases: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* He mentions God twice, on account of the two-fold love; and being forsaken, on account of bodily penance. So the Gloss says: "Why hast thou forsaken me? means, ‘Why have you exposed me to so much pain?’- said by the Son to the Father.

Of these three phrases, Habbakuk says: *The just man liveth by faith* [Gal 3.11; cf. Hab 2.4]. ‘Just’ implies keeping to what is right. ‘Just’ refers to the man himself, ‘faith’ to God, and ‘lives’ to his neighbour. He who is just, doing what is right regarding himself, judging and condemning himself, lives by faith in God in love of neighbour. As John says: *He that loveth not abideth in death* [1Jn 3.14].

**(On mercy, and the three properties of vinegar: *Because he is merciful*.)**

16. Again, if he is merciful to others, God will be merciful to him. The pitiless Jews did not act like this when they offered Christ, thirsting on the cross, not a cup of cold water but vinegar mixed with gall; and *when he had tasted, he would not drink* [cf. Mt 27.34], because though he tasted the bitterness of the punishment due to our guilt, he did not take into himself the guilt itself. Today, false Christians do the same thing to Jesus Christ, showing themselves worse than the Jews; and therefore they will find no mercy in the time of trouble.

Note that there are three things to consider regarding the vinegar. First, its sour taste; secondly, the purified wine; thirdly, its deterioration into vinegar. It is the same with the false Christian. Before Baptism he was a wild and sour grape, because he lacked faith. As the Apostle says, *We were all born children of wrath* [cf. Eph 2.3]. After Baptism, he became like a fragrant wine, by faith. But later still, he deteriorated into vinegar, by mortal sin. Vinegar is sour and watery. When wine is mixed with water, it quickly goes sour and acidic. When the faithful soul mingles with the water of carnal pleasure, he

quickly turns into the vinegar of mortal sin; which, so far as he can, he offers Christ to drink, I'd say, not hanging on the cross, but reigning now in heaven.

So Christ complains in Isaiah: *I looked that my vineyard should bring forth grapes, and it hath brought forth wild grapes* [Is 5.4]. Explaining this, he adds: *I looked that he should do judgement, and, behold, iniquity: and to do justice, and, behold, a cry* [Is 5.7]. Wild grapes grow by the way-side. The sinner's works, the iniquity of avarice and the cry of lust, are like wild grapes by the way-side, torn off by every passer by. So Ezekiel says:

*At every head of the way thou hast set up a sign of thy prostitution,*

*and hast made thy beauty to be abominable,*

*and hast prostituted thyself to every one that passed by.*[Ezek 16.25]

17. Again, he who wants to have cleanness of heart, so as to see God, must needs put an end to all sin, so as to say with Jesus: *It is consummated*. But the iniquities of the Amorrhites are not yet finished, and so, as Isaiah says: *The Lord God shall make a consummation, and and abridgement in the midst of all the land* [Is 10.23]; and Ezekiel:

*Thus saith the Lord God: The end is come, the end is come upon the four quarters of the land. Now is an end come upon thee. And I will send my wrath upon thee and I will judge thee according to thy ways*. [Ezek 7.2-3]

18. Again, he who has peace in his heart truly deserves to be called a child of God the Father, to whom he says in the hour of his death, with the only-begotten Son of God: *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit*, because he passes from peace of heart to eternal peace. So God promises in Isaiah:

*You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace.*

*The mountains and the hills shall sing praise before you:*

*and all the trees of the country shall clap their hands*. [Is 55.12]

You will go out from bodily things; great and small, the angelic powers will sing; and all the souls of the saints which are in heavenly bliss will clap, rejoicing at your coming. These, then, are the seven lights and seven funnels with which the candlestick is illumined, and the penny (the soul) is marked with the image of the king.

**(On hope and fear: *Two olive trees*.)**

19. There follows: *And two olive-trees over it, one on the right of the lamp and one on the left*. The lamp is the illumination of grace. The two olive-trees are hope and fear,

which protect the infused grace: the hope of pardon on the right, and the fear of punishment on the left. Of these two Micah says:

*I will shew thee, O man, what is good and what the Lord requireth of thee:*

*verily, to do judgement, and to love mercy, and to walk solicitous with thy God*. [Mic 6.8]

From judgement comes fear; mercy means works of mercy, from which arises hope. The Gloss says, "Seek no other reward in these, than to please God and walk with God as Enoch did, that you may be taken away by him like Enoch. Where there is fear and hope, there will be solicitous conversation with God."

And note that oil floats on other liquids, representing hope of eternal things, which is higher than anything transitory. Hope has been called the foot whereby we walk to the Lord. Hope is the expectation of good things yet to come, shown in humble demeanour and conscientious obedience. Oil seasons food, too, and we should season our every work with fear. So the psalm says: Serve ye the Lord with fear [Ps 2.11], so that *He that stands, let him take heed lest he fall* [cf. 1Cor 10.12]. And so that it should not appear as a wretched servitude, there is added: And rejoice unto him with trembling [Ps 2.11]; lest one should fall again into presumption. See now the meaning of the penny marked with the image, and the candlestick lit by the lamp, and how they are **concordant**.

Let us ask, then: *Whose is this image and superscription?* The superscription on the penny is the name of Christ, which is above every name [cf. Phil 2.9], upon the Christian. We are named after Christ, no-one else. So he himself says in the psalm:

*In thy book all shall be written: days shall be formed, and no one in them*. [Ps 138.16]

O Father, in me, the book of life, all the faithful are inscribed, that is, taught and named. Days shall be formed, those greater ones like the Apostles, of whom it is said: *Day to day uttereth speech* [Ps 18.3], and no-one of mine shall be formed in them, because they will not be called ‘of Peter’ or ‘of Paul’, but ‘of Christ’, whereby they are called Christians.

**(On the conversion of the sinner: *Take away the robe*.)**

20. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause of the Gospel: *Our conversation is in heaven* [Phil 3.20]. So that our conversation may be in heaven, we should pray the Lord to do for us what he himself says of Joshua son of Josedech in Zechariah:

*Take away the filthy garments from him. And he said to him: Behold, I have taken away thy iniquity and have clothed thee with a change of garments. And he said: Put a clean mitre upon his head. And they put a clean mitre upon his head and clothed him with*

*white garments*. [Zech 3.4-5]

The filthy garments represent worldly conversation, which soil the soul and the conscience. Whence it says in the Apocalypse: *He that is filthy, let him be filthy still* [Apoc 22.11]; and in Jeremiah: *Her filthiness is on her feet* [Lam 1.9], meaning unclean behaviour at the end of life. So Joel says: The beasts have rotted in their dung [Joel 1.17].

*Behold, I have taken away thy iniquity*. These are the filthy garments. The Lord first takes away the uncleanness of previous behaviour, and then puts on a change of clothing, virtues and decent morals, which make up heavenly conversation.

*And he said: Put a clean mitre upon his head*. A mitre has two points, representing the knowledge of the two Testaments and a two-fold love. The mitre on the head represents knowledge or two-fold love in the mind. The white garments are pure works in the flesh; whence the Lord says in the Apocalypse: *They shall walk with me in white, because they are worthy* [Apoc 3.4], and *their conversation is in heaven*.

*From whence also we look for the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, who will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of his glory* [Phil 3.20-21]. See how the penny is marked with the image of our king! He whose conversation is in heavenly, not earthly, matters, can securely look for the Saviour. The prophet Amos says the opposite:

*Woe to them that desire the day of the Lord! To what end is it for you?*

*The day of the Lord is darkness and not light*. [Am 5.18]

Trouble, not prosperity. Then they will see that the works they thought so bright are darkened. The Gloss says, "Many proud people seem to be just, and say they desire the day of judgement, or of their death, that they may begin to be with Christ. But he says ‘Woe’ to them, because none is without sin, and precisely because they have no fear in them, they deserve punishment." Only those may safely wait for the Lord Jesus, who abide in heavenly conversation.

21. And so Holy Church, in the Introit of today’s Mass, invites us to praise Jesus Christ, saying:

*O clap your hands, all ye nations: shout unto God with the voice of joy*.[Ps 46.2]

You nations converted to faith and penitence, whose conversation is in heaven, rejoice in good works. Let your hand and tongue be concordant. Let the former work and the latter confess. It says in Leviticus that the turtle-dove’s head should be twisted back to the wings [cf. Lev 5.8], meaning word should match deeds. What is the reason for clapping and shouting for joy? Because the Lord Jesus will change the body of our

lowness and wretchedness, so that it may be like the penny marked with the king's image, made like to the body of his glory, because: *We shall be like to him* [1Jn 3.2], and we *shall see him face to face* [1Cor 13.12] as he is, and his glory will be reflected in our faces.

Therefore, dearest brothers, let us humbly pray him, our Saviour Lord Jesus Christ, to reshape the penny and light the lamp of our souls, so that renewed in soul and body we may be conformed to his radiance in the glory of the resurrection. May he himself graciously grant us this, who is blessed and glorious, the most high God for ever and ever. Let every soul, marked with the king's image, say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] HORACE, *Epistolae*, I,2,47-48

[2] The whole passage closely follows the *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Ps 89.17, including

the quotation from AUGUSTINE

[3] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Job 12.5

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost: *As Jesus was speaking to the multitude*, which is divided into two clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon on the creation of angels and souls, and on preaching and faith: *Prepare to meet thy God*.)**

1. At that time: *As Jesus was speaking to the multitude, behold a certain ruler came up, and adored him, saying: Lord, my daughter is even now dead*, etc. [Mt 9.18]

The prophet Amos says:

*Be prepared to meet thy God, O Israel. For behold, he that formeth the mountains and createth the wind and declareth his word to man, he that maketh the morning mist and walketh upon the high places of the earth: the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name*. [Am 4.12-13]

Note these five: the mountains, the wind, his word, the mist, and the high places of the earth.

Allegorically. *O Israel*, the faithful soul who sees God by faith, *be prepared to meet thy God*, because his coming is at hand, which we celebrate next Sunday. You may ask, perhaps, "Who is he?" He is the one who forms the mountains, the angelic spirits who are called ‘mountains’ because of the excellence of their glory. Whence it says in Canticles:

*Behold he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills*. [Cant 2.8]

The Son of God, coming to his Incarnation, leaps over the choirs of angels, the greater and the lesser, and his herald comes before.

*He createth the wind*, souls of which the psalm says: *He flew upon the wings of the winds* [Ps 17.11]. As the Gloss says here, "The incomprehensible nature of Jesus Christ surpasses the powers of the soul, with which souls themselves raise themselves up as

on wings, from earthly fears into the breezes of freedom." Job says: *He made a weight for the winds* [Job 28.25]. God made a weight of flesh for souls, lest they fly away into pride like the devil.

*He declareth his word to man*. To create is to make something out of nothing. God creates souls out of nothing, because, as Augustine[1] says, "He creates by pouring in, and pours in as he creates." The psalm says: *He hath made the hearts of every one of them* [Ps 32.15], that is, as the Gloss says, "He created each soul separately, each one from nothing, and not from Adam, as some say who think the soul arises from the soul." Therefore he who created souls, declares his word to them, whereby the soul lives. As the psalm says: *Thy word takes fire vehemently* [Ps 118.140]. The Gloss says: "The divine word burns, to correct the conscience of the sinner, it purifies hearts like a furnace of gold, it kindles the love of God and enlightens those who hear it."

*He maketh the morning mist and walketh upon the high places of the earth*. The Gloss says: "Mist is a thickening of the air, and it represents the richness of faith which is conceived in the 'morning', the time of Baptism. The high places of the earth are virtues, or the saints set on the pinnacle of virtue. Yet the God of virtues transcends them all, and walks in the hearts of his own people."

**(The theme for a sermon on the Day of Pentecost: *When he hears the sound of one going*.)**

2. Whence there is a **concordance** to this in the second book of Kings, where the Lord says to David:

*And when thou shalt hear the sound of one going in the tops of the pear trees, then shalt thou join battle. For then will the Lord go out before thy face to strike the army of the Philistines*.[2Kg(Sm) 5.24]

The word 'pear' is connected with the Greek '*pyr*', 'fire', because the fruit of this tree seems to be shaped like a flame, wide at the bottom and narrow at the top, like fire. The 'pears' are the saints, aflame with the fire of charity, whose works begin from a fulness of charity and terminate in the littleness of humility. So the Lord says to them: *When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: we are unprofitable servants* [Lk 17.10]. The 'top' of these pear trees is an exalted life, a very pinnacle. The 'sound' is the infusion of the grace of Jesus Christ, who 'goes' in the sublime life of the saints. When this sound is heard by the just man, the Philistines (the movements of the flesh, or evil spirits) are overcome. He who is able to do all these things that have been said, is well able to free the woman from the issue of blood, and raise from the dead the daughter of the synagogue-ruler. Whence it says in today's Gospel: *As Jesus was speaking to the crowds*, etc.

3. There are two things to note in this Gospel, the cure of the woman with the issue of blood, and the raising of the daughter of the synagogue ruler. The first: *Behold, a*

*woman*, etc. The second: *When Jesus was come into the house of the ruler*, etc.

There is no proper Introit for today's Mass. The Epistle read is from the blessed Apostle Paul to the Colossians: *We cease not*, which we will divide into two parts and **concord** with the two clauses of the Gospel. The first part: *We cease not*; the second: *Giving thanks to God the Father*. In today's Gospel, Matthew deals with the woman with the haemorrhage, and the raising of the girl. Paul in today's Epistle prays that we may be filled with the knowledge of the will of God, which restrains the bloody flow of carnal pleasure; and tells us to be delivered from the power of darkness, as the girl was delivered from the darkness of death. That is why this Epistle is read with this Gospel.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(On the four lamps and their meaning: *I will search Jerusalem*.)**

4. Let us say, then: *As Jesus was speaking to the multitude*. Note that the death of the girl and the issue of blood signify mortal sin, in the consent of the mind and in execution of deed. Let us discuss the first:

*Behold a certain ruler came up, and adored him, saying: Lord, my daughter is even now dead; but come, lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live*. [Mt 9.18]

Mark and Luke say: Jairus by name, the ruler of the synagogue [cf. Mk 5.22; Lk 8.41]. Jairus means 'enlightened' or 'enlightening', and he represents any Christian, who should be enlightened, and should give light, by those lamps of which the Lord says by Zephaniah:

*And it shall come to pass at that time that I will search Jerusalem with lamps and will visit upon the men that are settled in their filth*. [Zeph 1.12]

Note that there are four lamps. The first is that of God's Word, of which is said: *Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths* [Ps 118.105]. Note that it speaks of 'feet' first, and then 'paths', because when we hear the word of God, we are first made to shine in heart, and then we walk with straight steps. The second lamp is that of good works, of which is said: Let your loins be girt and lamps burning in your hands [Lk 12.35]. We hold lamps burning in our hands when we show good works to our neighbours. The third lamp is that of intention, which gives light to the whole collection of good works. Matthew says: *The light of thy body* (your work) is thy eye (your intention). *If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome* [Mt 6.22]. The fourth is that of the humanity of Jesus Christ, of which Luke says: *What woman having ten groats*, etc. [Lk 15.8] (See above regarding that Gospel [Pentecost III].

Let the Lord say, "in the time of judgement I will search Jerusalem", that is, each and every Christian. I will search with lamps: does he hear the word of preaching and amend his life? Does he show the light of good example to others? Does he do his works with a

right intention? Does he shape his life by the example of the poverty and humility of Jesus Christ? Then he will visit upon men (those who trust in their own strength) who are settled in their filth, their iniquities.

**(On the keeping of the heart: *I will stand on guard*.)**

5. This Jairus is called ruler of the synagogue, because every Christian should be ruler of his body, which is as it were a synagogue. Ecclesiasticus says:

*The synagogue of sinners is like tow heaped together:*

*and the end of them is a flame of fire*. [Ecclus 21.10]

The five bodily senses are like a heap of straw, easily enkindled by the fire of concupiscence; and so Jairus must rule them, so as to say with Habbakuk:

*I will stand upon my watch and fix my foot upon the tower:*

*and I will watch, to see what will be said to me*

*and what I may answer to him that reproveth me*. [Hab 2.1]

He ‘stands on his watch’, who guards his heart with the greatest care. He ‘fixes his foot on the tower’, who restrains the senses of the flesh, with an intention of final perseverance; and so he watches to see what will be said to him, and what he may answer, to the one who reproves him.

This is what Job says:

*I would set judgement before him, and would fill my mouth with complaints:*

*that I might know the words that he would answer me,*

*and understand what he would say to me*. [Job 23.4-5]

St Gregory’s Gloss[2] says, "To set judgement before God is to open the eyes of our consideration in the secrecy of the mind, by contemplation of the faith, to gaze on his examination. To fill the mouth with complaints, is, while undergoing the judge’s examination, to hurl bitter reproaches against oneself. To know the words is, when pursuing one’s faults to punish them, to find what the judge says about them to us, in his examination."

If the ruler of the synagogue does these things, he can draw near with faith, and adore

Jesus with devotion, saying: Lord, my daughter is even now dead, etc. The daughter of the synagogue ruler, lying dead in the house, is any Christian soul who by consent to sin lies dead in the house of conscience. So Amos says:

*The virgin of Israel is cast down upon her land: and there is none to raise her up*. [Am 5.2]

Note that there is a double state, of justice and of justification. Of justice, when a man who has been given grace does not fall into mortal sin; of justification, when he rises again after falling. It is true that when a man falls, though he rise again, he does not have the same glory, the same glorious state; it is impossible for him not to have lost his prior state, yet he may have a greater glory, if he afterwards has a greater charity. The virgin of Israel is the soul: a virgin by faith, Israel by hope. She is cast down upon her land when with her miserable flesh she consents to concupiscence.

But come, *lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live*. O blessed Jesus! Wherever your hand is, there is our life! Ezekiel says: *The hand of the Lord was with me, strengthening me* [Ezek 3.14]. Note these three: *Come, lay thy hand*, and, *she shall live*. O Lord Jesus, come and help by pouring in your grace, so that the daughter, my soul, may be contrite. Lay your hand on her, that she may confess. Jeremiah says: *The Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth* [Jer 1.9], for the confession of sin. And so she shall live, with the life of grace in the present, and the life of glory in the future.

**(The theme for a sermon for penitents on confession: *I lifted my eyes and saw; and behold a man*.)**

6. There is a **concordance** to this in the prophet Zechariah, where he says:

*I lifted up my eyes ans saw: and, behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand.*

*And I said: Whither goest thou? And he said to me: To measure Jerusalem*

*and to see how great is the breadth thereof and how great the length thereof*. [Zech 2.1-2]

Let us see the meaning of these six things: the man and his hand, the line, Jerusalem and its length and breadth. The man is Christ, of whom Zechariah says: *Behold a man, the Orient is his name* [Zech 6.12]. Jesus Christ is his name, which agrees with ‘a man, the Orient’: Jesus the Saviour. Behold the man, who by his strength has saved his people. Christ, anointed with chrism. Behold the Orient, who has enlightened those sitting in darkness [cf. Lk 1.17]. The ‘hand’ of this man is his mercy, of which Mark says: *They besought him that he would lay his hand upon him* [Mk 7.32]. See the Gospel: Jesus going out of the coast of Tyre, came by Sidon [Pentecost XII].

The measuring line is the confession of sins. So Solomon says: *A three-fold cord is not easily broken* [Eccles 4.12]. Note that the sinner should do three things in confession: he should lament what is past, have a firm intention of not falling back, and obey his confessor's instructions in everything. If our boat is tied to the wood of the Lord's cross with such a cord, it will never be torn away. This rope is in the hand of Christ, who gives the grace of confession to whom he will, by the inspiration of his mercy.

With this line he himself measures Jerusalem, the soul of each penitent, to see (that is, to make him see) what may be the length of his perseverance and what may be the breadth of his two-fold charity. He who sins mortally offends God, injures himself, and scandalises his neighbour. But when he repents and confesses, intending to persevere to the end, then he pleases God, heals himself and edifies his neighbour. This is the length and breadth of Jerusalem, which is measured with the line of confession, that penance may be proportionate to guilt, and as he yielded his members to serve iniquity, unto iniquity; so he should yield them to serve justice, unto sanctification [cf. Rom 6.19].

Come, then, O Orient, and measure Jerusalem with the line you have in your hand. Come, O Lord Jesus, and lay your hand upon the soul, and she shall live by the life of grace in the present, and by the life of glory in the future.

**(On the four horns in Zechariah and their meaning: *I lifted my eyes and saw; and behold four horns*.)**

7. There follows: *And Jesus rising up followed him, with his disciples* [Mt 9.19]. O inexpressible kindness! O wonderful humility! The king of angels follows the ruler of the synagogue! You follow Jairus; and who follows you, O Son of God? Jeremiah says:

*They walked in their own will and in the perversity of their wicked heart,*

*and went backward and not forward*. [Jer 7.24]

And Zechariah:

*They turned away the shoulder to depart: and they stopped their ears, not to hear.*

*And they made their heart as the adamant stone, lest they should hear the law*. [Zech 7.11-12]

*And when Jesus was come into the house of the ruler, and saw the minstrels and the multitude making a rout, he said: Give place, for the girl is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn*. [Mt 9.23-24]

Let us see what is meant, morally, by the minstrels and the multitude making a rout. The minstrels are the bodily senses, which sing a sorrowful song with those four horns of

which there is a **concordance** in Zechariah:

*And I lifted up my eyes, and saw: and, behold, four horns.*

*And I said to the angel that spoke to me: What are these? And he said to me:*

*These are the horns that have scattered Juda and Israel and Jerusalem*. [Zech 1.18-19]

These four horns represent vices, namely pride or lust in the eyes, prurient hearing in the ears, detraction or flattery in the tongue, and robbery or usury in the hands. These are what have tossed to the winds, to every wind of worldly vanity, Juda (the laity) and Israel (the clergy) and Jerusalem (religious). With these horns the bodily senses sing a sad song, the joy of the world at the death of our soul. So Job says:

*They take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ.*

*They spend their days in wealth. And in a moment they go down to hell*. [Job 21.12-13]

A timbrel is made of skin stretched over a wooden frame. The timbrel is taken when the proud man lifts his eyelids on high, as in Proverbs: A generation whose eyes are lofty, and their eyelids lifted up on high [Prov 30.13]; or when the lustful man casts his eyes on feminine beauty, as in Proverbs: *Let not thy heart covet her beauty: be not caught with her winks* [Prov 6.25]. The tongue of flattery or detraction is like a harp, which when plucked gives forth the sound of detraction or flattery. He who has prurient ears rejoices in the sound of the organ, his own praise. Woe to us wretched people, who rejoice at the sound of our own organ, which when it sounds causes our eye to smile, our face to grow cheerful, our ear to rejoice, our tongue to dance, our heart to exult. They rejoice at the sound of the organ. Would that, as Job says, our harp might be turned into mourning: and our organ into the voice of those that weep [cf. Job 30.31]. Those who rob or extort the goods of the poor spend their days in wealth. See how the cursed minstrels sing their sorrowful song. Believe me, in a moment, a point that will pierce them to their innermost heart and soul, they will go down to hell, to sing the sorrowful song of weeping eyes and gnashing teeth.

The noisy crowd is the trouble and tumult of evil thoughts. While outside the minstrels sing their sorrowful song, tumultuous thoughts riot within the mind. So the bride says in Canticles: *My soul troubled me for the chariots of Aminadab* [Cant 6.11]. Aminadab means ‘unbridled’ or ‘urbane’, and he represents our body, which of its own accord casts itself into temporal things, and always wants to live in a ‘civilized’ and delicate way. The chariots of Aminadab are the bodily senses, and as they roll through the mud and dung of temporal things, the soul (here meaning the animal or sensual nature) troubles the reason with a tumultuous crowd of evil thoughts.

8. Let us return to our subject, and say: *When Jesus was come into the house of the ruler*. The ruler is Everyman, who should rule himself, whose house is his conscience.

The Lord enters it when he pours his grace into it, that it may recognise its guilt, and, with this knowledge, be ashamed.

*And when he saw the minstrels and the multitude, he said: Give place*. When Jesus Christ visits the human conscience with his grace, he commands sensual pleasure and tumultuous thoughts to depart. He commands the winds, the vanity of the senses, and the sea, the tossing of the mind, and they obey him [cf. Lk 8.25]. *Give place, for the girl is not dead, but sleepeth*. She slept, truly: for he could rouse her from death just as easily as from sleep. Note that the death of the soul is two-fold: that of sin, and that of hell. The death of sin is called a sleep, because any sinner in this life can rise from sin as easily as someone can awake from sleep. So the Apostle says: *Rise, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall enlighten thee* [Eph 5.14]: rise by contrition, you who sleep in sin, and arise by confession from your dead works.

Note that he addresses her as a little girl, not an old woman. The soul that has not yet spent long in evil habits is laid low, but is like a little child slumbering in sin. She was dead and raised within the house, not carried out of doors and buried, because the soul which is dead in the house of conscience, and not yet carried to the door of action, or the tomb of evil custom, can easily be restored to life.

*And they laughed him to scorn*. When Jesus Christ breathes grace into the soul, that it may lament its sins and rise from them, the minstrels (the outward pleasure of the senses) and the riotous crowd (the inner tumult of the thoughts) mock. As Job says, (The ostrich) *scorneth the horse and his rider* [Job 39.18]. This stands for the earth-bound pleasure of the flesh, which mocks the horse of the spirit, and its rider, grace, when it tries to guide it into the way of life, to receive the reward of heavenly glory. It mocks, I say, when the frailty of nature, the rigour of abstinence, and the harshness of penance are set before it, and it shows that it is unable to persevere in them.

There follows: *And when the multitude was put forth, he went in and took her by the hand, (saying: Maid, arise* [cf. Lk 8.54]), and the maid arose [Mt 9.25]. Note the order of the words: when the multitude was put forth, he went in. This is **concordant** to what the Lord says in Hosea:

*I will destroy the bow and the sword and war out of the land:*

*and I will make them sleep secure*. [Hos 2.18]

The bow is the devil's deceitful tempting; the sword is the tumultuous thinking of the heart; war is the lustful pleasure of the senses. The Lord destroys these out of the land, when he casts the riotous crowd out of the house of conscience; and when they are cast out he enters, and, entering, brings peace. This is to make them sleep secure, to rest.

*He took her by the hand*. He takes the hand when he gives, by his mercy, to will, to know and to be able. There is a **concordance** to this in Zechariah:

*The hands of Zorobabel have laid the foundations of this house,*

*and his hand shall finish it*. [Zech 4.9]

Zorobabel means ‘Master of Babylon’, and he stands for Jesus Christ, who came to renew the world and raise the girl to life. He said: The Son of man is come to save that which was lost [cf. Lk 19.10]. By the hand of his mercy he lays the foundations of the temple when he gives us to know and will; he finishes it when he gives us the power to act.

And he said: Maid, arise. And the maiden arose. There is a **concordance** to this in the prophet Micah, where the soul, risen again by grace, despises the insults of the flesh, and says:

*Rejoice not, thou, my enemy, over me, because I am fallen.*

*I shall arise when I sit in darkness . The Lord is my light*. [Mic 7.8]

**(For enclosed religious: *Behold I will give milk*.)**

9. The first part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this first clause:

*We cease not to pray for you, and to beg that you may be filled with the knowledge of the will of God.* [Col 1.9]

To this prayer and request the Lord replies mercifully in Hosea:

*Behold, I will allure her and will lead her into the wilderness:*

*and I will speak to her heart.* [Hos 2.14]

The Lord allures the Church, or the faithful soul, for which the Apostle prays and begs, with grace; that he may increase her in salvation, and afterwards lead her into the wilderness of abstinence from temporal things, and quietude of mind, so as to speak to her heart and fill her with the knowledge of his will.

Note that the Apostle says: *Be filled*. If you overfill a full vessel, you will lose what you put in. Someone full of temporal concerns cannot be filled with the knowledge of God’s will. So he who would be filled must first be led into the wilderness; and there he will hear the whisper of a gentle breeze speaking to his heart, and he will be filled with the knowledge of the divine will. So it says in today’s Gospel that the Lord first casts out the riotous crowd, and afterwards, as it were in the wilderness, speaks to the heart of the girl: *Damsel, I say to thee, arise* [Mk 5.41]. The mouth of the Lord is at the ear of the

heart, in the wilderness of restfulness where he reveals the secret of his will. Let your heart be still, and you will be filled with knowledge of the divine will. He says*: To whom shall I have respect, but to him that is humble and quiet and poor in spirit?* [cf. Is 66.2] *He hath regarded the humility of his handmaid* [Lk 1.48], who dwelt in solitude of mind and body. St Jerome[3] says, "To me the town is a prison, the wilderness is paradise", where the Lord speaks to the heart.

Let us humbly ask him, dearest brothers, with Jairus the ruler of the synagogue, to come to our house, to cast out the riotous crowd, and raise our daughter. May he graciously grant this to us, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(The theme for a sermon against carnal folk, and the seven deadly sins: *I will go after my lovers*.)**

10. There follows, secondly:

*And behold, a woman who was troubled with an issue of blood twelve years*, etc. [Mt 9.20]

Let us see what is meant by these three: the woman, the issue of blood, and the hem of his garment. The woman, called ‘the weaker sex’, represents the sinful soul, who says in the prophet Hosea:

*I will go after my lovers that give me my bread and my water,*

*my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink*. [Hos 2.5]

Soft souls go after soft things. Let us see what is meant by these seven: the lovers, and the bread, etc. The lovers of the sinful soul are the demons, or the carnal affections. She goes after them, when she consents to them, and she consents to them because they give her bread, etc. The bread represents the pomp of temporal glory, the water is gluttony and lust, the wool is deceitful hypocrisy, the flax is the love of money, the oil is the gleam of flattery, the drink is desire for dignities.

Of the loaves, or bread, of temporal glory, Solomon says, in Proverbs:

*The bread of lying is sweet to a man*: worldly pomp, which pretends to be something, whereas it is nothing;

*but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel*, [Prov 20.17] eternal punishment.

Of the waters of gluttony and lust, the prophet Nahum says: *Her waters are like a great*

*pool* [Nah 2.8]- referring to Ninive, which means ‘beautiful’. This represents man’s flesh, whose waters (gluttony and lust) are like a pool which dries up in the summer heat. So, in the drought of death, the gluttony and lust of the flesh are altogether dried up.

Of the wool of hypocrisy, see the Gospel: *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep*, etc. [Mt 7.15] See above, in that Gospel [Pentecost VIII].

Of the flax of avarice, Exodus says that the hail damaged the flax [cf. Ex 9.31]. The hail of the divine sentence, *Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire* [cf. Mt 25.41], will damage and destroy avarice and usury.

Of the oil of flattery, the psalm says: *Let not the oil of the sinner fatten my head* [Ps 140.5].

Of the drink of dignities, the Apocalypse speaks of

*the woman who sat upon the scarlet beast having a golden cup in her hand, full of the abomination and filthiness of her fornication*. [cf. Apoc 17.3-4]

This woman represents the vanity of the world, which is seated upon a scarlet beast, the devil. She has a golden cup in her hand, the bright show of transient honours, full of abomination. The conscience and deeds of those who are blinded by this brightness bear witness to themselves and to us how great therein is the abomination and unclean fornication. Whoever drinks from this cup will thirst again, and burn: and, please God, not for ever with the purple-clad Feaster! Alas, alas! I see them all, with gaping mouth and burning throat, running to drink of the golden cup of fornication. Jeremiah says:

*A swift runner pursuing his course;*

*a wild ass accustomed to the wilderness in the desire of his heart*

*snuffed up the wind of his love*.[Jer 2.23-24]

Like the wind, which when drawn in by an open mouth does not slake thirst, but makes it greater, so does the vanity of honours: and sometimes it kills its drinker, from very thirst!

Whoever is infected with these six vices is like the woman who suffered from the issue of blood. The issue of blood consists in the manifest uncleanness of sin; as Hosea says: *Blood hath touched blood* [Hos 4.2], meaning that the uncleanness of the mind extends to uncleanness of deed. As has been said, *whose issue is as the issue of horses* [cf. Ezek 23.20].

She suffered an issue of blood for twelve years. Ten for the precepts of the Old Testament, two for those of the New. The issue of blood is suffered for twelve years by

whoever is defiled by the malice of open sin against the precepts of the two Testaments. So Hosea says:

*They have committed fornication and have not ceased:*

*because they have forsaken the Lord in not observing* [Hos 4.10]

(that is, the precepts of either Testament).

**(Against those who in their sickness trust in doctors and riches: *Asa fell sick*.)**

Luke says that this woman had *bestowed all her substance on physicians and could not be healed by any* [Lk 8.43]; Mark adds, *but rather was worse* [Mk 5.26]. The physicians are the carnal affections, of which the psalm says:

*Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead?*

*Or shall physicians raise to life, and give praise to thee?* [Ps 87.11]

The carnal affections cannot raise the soul from sin, they kill one that has been raised and bury it in hell. How many soft and feeble folk spend all their resources on these physicians of either man (soul and body), and can find no cure for the sickness of the soul- rather, they grow worse!

11. So it says in the second book of Chronicles that:

*Asa fell sick of a most violent pain in his feet. And yet in his illness he did not seek the Lord, but rather trusted in the skill of physicians. And he slept with his fathers, and he died*. [2Chr 16.12-13]

Asa means ‘lifting up’; he represents the rich man of this world, who lifts himself up in riches, and *walks in wonderful things above himself* [cf. Ps 130.1]. He falls sick of a most violent pain in the feet. The soul has two feet, which support it, namely fear and hope, of whose strength the rich man of this world is deprived. He puts his hope in transient things, which he fears to lose, and so he trusts more and more in the skill of physicians (the industry, wisdom and experience of his carnal affections) rather than in the Lord. And so he sleeps in sin and dies in hell.

**(On the Passion of Christ: *She touched the hem*.)**

We should not trust in physicians, but in the hem of his garment, of which is added: *She came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment* [Mt 9.20]. The garment of Christ is his flesh, of which Isaiah says:

*Why is thy apparel red, and thy garments like theirs that tread in the winepress?*

*I have trodden the winepress alone*. [Is 63.2-3]

Zechariah says something similar: *Jesus was clothed with filthy garments* [Zech 3.3]. Jesus Christ bore the winepress alone, the weight of the cross, whereon he reddened his apparel with blood. The hem of this garment is the Passion itself, which frees the soul from the issue of blood. The remembrance of the Passion is the strongest remedy against the deceitful and lustful flesh. And if the ointment should run down from the head to the beard, indeed to the skirt of the garment [cf. Ps 132.2], that is, to the very last part of Christ's life, its fulness will run over the whole earth.

Regarding this skirt, it says in Zechariah:

*Men of all languages... shall take hold the skirt of one that is a Jew, saying:*

*We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you*. [Zech 8.23]

This is the very thing the woman said within herself: If I shall touch only his garment, I shall be healed [Mt 9.21]. This hem, the Passion of Christ, draws more to Christ himself than all the rest of his life. So he says: If I be lifted up from the earth, *I will draw all things to myself* [Jn 12.32]. If then you want to be cured of your issue of blood, O soul, touch with faith, take hold with deed, the hem of the Passion. The Apostle says:

*They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences*.[Gal 5.24]

If you thus touch and take hold, you will be able to hear the words:

*Be of good heart, daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole*. [Mt 9.22]

Faith involves utterance and action. If I do what I say, and take hold of what I touch, there is faith, and such faith saves me.

12. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** with this second clause:

*Giving thanks to God the Father, who hath made us worthy to be partakers of the lot of the saints in light*. [Col 1.12]

O Father, how many thanks the synagogue ruler's daughter, raised from the dead, and the woman cured of the issue of blood, should offer: that is to say, those who are represented by these two, those whom you have made worthy of a share in eternal life, allotted to the saints. *The Lord is the portion of my inheritance* [Ps 15.5], it says, and this inheritance is in light, according to the psalm: *In thy light we shall see light* [Ps 35.10].

*Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love* [Col 1.13]. Behold the raising of the synagogue-ruler's daughter, the soul, which he delivers with the hand of mercy from the power of darkness, in which she lay blind; and translates from the region of unlikeness into the kingdom of his love, which we have received through the Passion of his Son, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the remission of sins. Behold the healing of the woman from her issue of blood, by the hem of his garment. The blood of the Lord's Passion restrains the blood of our sins.

Let us then, dearest brothers, devoutly pray the Lord Jesus Christ that he will restrain our blood with the hem of his Passion, whereby we may offer him fitting thanks, and be able to reign with the saints in his light. May he grant this, who is glorious in his miracles, the blessed God for ever and ever. Let every raised and healed soul say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] in PETER LOMBARD, *Sententiae* II, dist. 17.2

[2] *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Job 23.4-5

[3] JEROME, *Epistola* 125, *ad Rusticum*, 7; PL 22.1076

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

[PROLOGUE FOR ADVENT]

We offer praise and thanksgiving to God, Three and One, by whose help we have reached the first Sunday of the Lord's Advent in our exposition of the Sunday Gospels. Note, then, that Isaiah is read in Church throughout the whole of Advent, and we intend to concord various texts of his to the Advent Gospels and Epistles, as the Lord shall grant.

## FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

**(The Gospel for the first Sunday in Advent, which is divided into four clauses: *There shall be signs in the sun and in the moon*, etc.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon for penitents or religious: *In that day the bud of the Lord shall be*.)**

1. At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: *There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars*. [Lk 21.25]

Isaiah says:

*In that day the bud of the Lord shall be in magnificence and glory:*

*and the fruit of the earth shall be high*. [Is 4.2]

This text will be expounded first allegorically, of the Word Incarnate; and second morally, of the converted sinner.

*In that day*, that is, in the time of grace when the brightness of the eternal light shone on those who sat in darkness (Isaiah says with prophetic certainty), *the bud of the Lord shall be*, the Son of the Father, whom blessed Mary, the tree of life, brought forth like a bud in the Nativity. Isaiah says:

*Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above*

(let Gabriel come and send down upon us the dew of his message),

*and let the clouds rain the just*

(let the prophets foretell Christ's Nativity, watering our hearts with saving rain);

*let the earth be opened*

(that is, Mary at her believing),

*and*, thus, *bud forth a Saviour*.

This bud was *in magnificence*, doing great things as to preaching and working miracles; *and in glory*, as regards the Resurrection. The *fruit of the earth*, that is, of the blessed Virgin, he was *high* in his Ascension.

Of the magnificence of miracles, Isaiah says:

*God himself will come and save you.*

*Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened,*

*and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.*

*Then shall the lame man leap as a hart,*

*and the tongue of the dumb shall be free*. [Is 35.5-6]

Of the glory of the Resurrection he says:

*They shall see the glory of the Lord and the beauty of our God*. [Is 35.2]

Whence John says:

*We saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only-begotten of the Father*. [Jn 1.14]

Of the height of the Ascension, the Father says in Isaiah, speaking of the Son:

*Behold, my servant shall understand:*

*he shall be exalted and extolled, and shall be exceeding high*. [Is 52.13]

The Son is called the servant of the Father because he was obedient even unto death [Phil 2.8]

**(On confession: *The glory of Libanus*; or: *In that day, the Lord shall shave*.)**

2. Morally. *In that day*, etc. Day is when the sun gives light to the earth. When the sun of grace illuminates the earth (the sinner's mind), then it produces the bud of the Lord, meaning contrition. So Isaiah says:

*The rain and the snow come down from heaven...*

*and soak the earth and water it, and make it to spring,*

*and give seed to the sower and bread to the eater*. [Is 55.10]

The rain and the snow signify the grace of the Holy Spirit. Regarding the snow, see the Gospel: *Jesus took Peter*, etc. [Lent IIA]. Grace, the divine mercy, comes down like rain and snow and waters the earth (the sinner who savours earthly things) so as to make him heedless of them, pricked with tears, laying bare the secret of his wickedness. This soaking, then, does three things: it renders heedless, it produces tears, it uncovers what is hidden. *It waters it* with the spirit of poverty, of which Isaiah says:

*Let the spirit be poured upon us from on high*, [Is 32.15]

lest, as Job says, *Thirst burn against her* [Job 18.19], the thirst of cupidity. And it makes it to spring in magnificence, which comes about when he is universally contrite for all he has done or failed to do. Then it gives the seed of good works to the sower (the penitent who sows in tears) and bread to the eater (who reaps in exultation). In that day, then, the bud of the Lord will be in magnificence.

There follows: *and glory*. From the bud of contrition flowers the glory of confession, of which Isaiah says to the penitent soul:

*The glory of Libanus is given to it, the beauty of Carmel and Saron*. [Is 35.2]

Libanus is ‘whiteness’, Carmel ‘cutting away’ and Saron ‘song of sadness’. Confession does these three things: it whitens the soul, it cuts away what is not needed, and it weeps and sings the song "*My soul is sorrowful even unto death*" [Mt 26.38]. *A woman in labour hath sadness* [Jn 16.21].

Of the whitening of the soul from sin, Isaiah says:

*If the Lord shall wash away the filth from the daughters of Sion,*

*and shall wash away the blood of Jerusalem out of the midst thereof,*

*in the spirit of judgement and in the spirit of burning*. [Is 4.4]

Filth represents unclean thoughts. As Jeremiah says: *Her filthiness is on her feet* [Lam 1.9], meaning her affections. Blood represents the lust of the flesh. The Lord washes this from the daughters of Sion (the souls that belong to the Church) by the spirit of judgement (confession, whereby the penitent judges and condemns himself) and by the spirit of burning (contrition, with which the soul burns and then overflows in tears of compunction).

Of the cutting away of what is superfluous in confession, Isaiah says:

*In that day, the Lord will shave with a razor that is sharp (or hired) by them that are beyond the river... the head and the hairs of the feet, and the whole beard*. [Is 7.20]

The razor which smartens up a man is confession, which renews his spirit. So Jeremiah says:

*Break up anew your fallow ground, and sow not upon thorns*, [Jer 4.3]

lest they grow up and choke the word of confession. This razor is called sharp or hired, either because it cuts through sin and its circumstances, or because the sinner should pay a kind of fee for it in his work of salvation, devotion and humility. The razor belongs to those beyond the river, that is, who have passed through the waters of Baptism. *The Lord shaves the head*, etc. The head and feet stand for the beginning and end of life, and the beard for strength in good work. With the keen edge of confession the Lord shaves vice (‘hairs’) from the penitent, from his first entry into the world to his final departure. He shaves the whole beard, so that he may not put his trust in any good deed that he does, as if he himself did it. We should put our trust only in him who made us, not in what we ourselves do. He who made us is wholly good, the Supreme Good; but the good things we do are *like blood-stained rags* [cf. Is 64.6]. Decide for yourself what good you should trust in: surely in the good Lord Jesus, to whom the Prophet says, *Thou art good* [Ps 118.68].

Of the song of sadness, Isaiah says:

*By the ascent of Luith they shall go up weeping:*

*and in the way of Oronaim they shall lift up a cry of contrition*. [Is 15.5]

See above [Pentecost X, clause 3].

There follows in our previous text: *And the fruit of the earth shall be high*. The fruit of the earth is the satisfaction of penance. So Isaiah says:

*This is all the fruit, that the sin thereof should be taken away*. [Is 27.9]

The fruit of penitence is high when the penitent is lowly, humbling himself before the high yet humble true sun, Jesus Christ, who shades the splendour of his light with the sack-cloth of our mortality. So it says in today's Gospel: *There will be signs in the sun*, etc.

3. Note that there are four Comings of Jesus Christ. The first was in the flesh, of which is said: *Behold the great Prophet comes, and he will renew Jerusalem*. The second is in the soul: *We will come to him and will make our abode with him* [Jn 14.23]. The third is at death: *Blessed is that servant, who when the Lord comes*, etc. The fourth will be in majesty, whence it says in the Apocalypse: *Behold he cometh with the clouds, and every eye shall see him* [Apoc 1.7]. These four comings are noted in the first four words of this Sunday's Gospel, and we will treat each one of them in turn.

In the Introit of today's Mass we sing: *To thee I have lifted up my soul*. The Epistle of blessed Paul to the Romans is read: *Know that it is now the hour*, which we will **concord** with the first and the second advents (that is, in the mind); the Introit of the Mass we will take with the third and fourth advent. First, then, we will treat of the first Advent.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(On the Annunciation or the Nativity of the Lord: *I saw the Lord*; and: *The potter sitting*.)**

4. *There will be signs in the sun and in the moon*. The sun, which shines alone, is Jesus Christ who alone dwells in inaccessible light [cf. 1Tim 6.16]. In comparison with his brightness and holiness, all the brightness of the saints suffers loss. So Isaiah says:

*We are all become as one unclean* (i.e. leprous)

*and all our justices as the rag of a menstruous woman*. [Is 64.6]

This sun, as the Apocalypse says,

*became black as sackcloth of hair*. [Apoc 6.12]

He covered the light of his divinity with the sack-cloth of our humanity:

*I made haircloth my garment*. [Ps 68.12]

What has sack-cloth to do with you, O Son of God? That is the garment a criminal should wear, not God; a sinner, not the Creator. It is the robe of the penitent, not of one who forgives sins. What, then, has sack-cloth to do with you? Much indeed, and it is in every way necessary for sinful man; for:

*It repenteth me that I have made man*. [Gen 6.7]

That is, a punishment is due to me for man's sake. Isaiah says:

*Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins;*

*thou hast wearied me with thy iniquities*. [Is 43.24]

And:

*I am weary of bearing them*. [Is 1.14]

So the sun became black as sack-cloth, the *brightness of eternal light* [cf. Wisd 7.26] hid itself beneath the sack-cloth of flesh. Isaiah says that the bud of life is *... God, and there is no God beside thee.*

*Verily thou art a hidden God, the God of Israel, the Saviour*. [Is 45.14-15]

And again:

*His look was as it were hidden*. [Is 53.3]

Hidden indeed! The hook of divinity was hidden under the bait of humanity, that he might slay *the dragon* (the devil) *that is in the sea*, that is, the salt and bitter world [cf. Is 27.1]. So Job says:

*In his eyes as with a hook he shall take Behemoth*. [Job 40.19]

The humble one catches the proud; our little child catches the ancient serpent. Whence Isaiah says:

*The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp;*

*and the weaned child shall thrust his hand into the den of the basilisk*. [Is 11.8]

Our Child, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, draws with his powerful hand the asp or basilisk (the devil) from his hole or den (the conscience of sinners).

So, *the sun became black like sack-cloth*. O First! O Last! O Highest! O humble and lowly! Isaiah says:

*We thought of him as it were a leper,*

*and as one struck by God and afflicted*. [Is 53.4]

5. Regarding this humility, there is a **concordance** in the same book:

*I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and elevated*. [Is 6.1]

Note: let us see what is meant by the Lord's sitting, the throne, high and elevated.

The Lord's sitting is the humble bowing down of his divinity in human nature. So Ecclesiasticus says:

*The potter sitting at his work, turning the wheel about with his feet,*

*who is always carefully set to his work*. [Ecclus 38.32]

The potter is the Son of God, of whom the Psalm says:

*He hath made the hearts of every one of them*. [Ps 32.15]

He sits, humbling himself in flesh, at his work, for the sake of our salvation. So Isaiah says:

*That he may do his work, his strange work:*

*that he may perform his work, his work is strange to him*. [Is 28.21]

St Gregory says, "He comes into the world to do his work: he redeems the human race. But his work is strange to him, it does not befit his divinity to be spat upon, scourged and crucified." With the feet of his humanity he turns the wheel of our humanity towards life, which was previously running towards death; so that whereas it was formerly said to it, *Earth thou art and to earth thou shalt return* [Gen 3.129], now is said, *Blessed art thou, and it shall be well with thee* [Ps 127.2]. The Gospels show clearly enough how great a concern he had for thirty-three years, to finish his work. He says in the Psalm, *I ran* [Ps 61.5]. He ran to the Cross as to a furnace, with so great a desire to bake and complete his work that he made no reply to Pilate, lest perhaps the business of our salvation might be delayed.

6. *A throne*, etc. A throne is a firmly based seat, and it represents the humanity of Christ,

which is firm and solid in every way, being based on seven pillars. So Isaiah says:

*In that day, seven women shall take hold of one man, saying:*

*We will eat our own bread and wear our own apparel;*

*only let us be called by thy name. Take away our reproach*. [Is 4.1]

These seven women are the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are called 'women' because no-one is born of God except by the Spirit. The man is Christ, 'one', because he alone is without sin. The seven gifts take hold of him, so as to grasp him firmly and not let him go. They pass by all other husbands but Christ, taking hold of no-one else. There is no man who does not sin. In all others is the dwelling of the spirit of tribulation, not the dwelling of peace. The spirit was in the prophets and other just men, but because they were men, and therefore sinners, it was in them but did not dwell in them. Only of Christ does John say:

*He upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining,*

*he it is that baptizeth*. [Jn 1.33]

So they *take hold of one man, saying: We will eat our own bread*, etc. The Gloss says, "He who has food and clothing, needs no more." *We will eat our own bread and wear our own apparel*: that is, to have the Holy Spirit, equally with the Father and the Son, is to possess all things and lack nothing. *Let us be called by thy name*: that is, Christians are named after you, all who desire to be fulfilled in our dwelling. *Take away our reproach*: lest we be compelled any longer to share a lodging with the filth of vice which has been driven out of human hearts.

7. The humanity of Christ, in which divinity sits (humbles itself) as on a throne, was *high and lifted up*. High with incomparable holiness, as in John:

*He that cometh from above is above all*, [Jn 4.31]

by the excellence of his life. So Isaiah says of him:

*He shall eat butter and honey,*

*that he may know how to refuse the evil and choose the good*. [Is 7.15]

Note that two things are made of sheep's milk, butter and cheese. Butter is sweet and soft, cheese dry and hard. The sheep is Adam: before sin his nature was like butter in innocence and purity; after sin it was dry and hard like cheese. So:

*Cursed is the earth* (thy flesh) *in thy work;*

*thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee*. [Gen 3.17]

When Emmanuel came, whom the Virgin conceived, he ate not cheese but butter, because he did not take corrupt flesh subject to sin, but the purest flesh from the Virgin's purest flesh. He also ate honey, which falls from above and denotes the supereminence of his life.

Christ's humanity was also lifted up on the wood of the Cross. So in John:

*When I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to myself*, [Jn 12.32]

with the hook of the Cross whereon our sun was covered with sack-cloth and signed with five marks. Thus, *There will be signs in the sun*.

**(On the Lord's Passion and his five wounds: *There will be five cities*.)**

8. The signs in the sun are the five wounds in the body of Christ. These are

*Five cities in the land of Egypt, speaking the language of Canaan...*

*One shall be called the city of the sun*. [Is 19.18]

Egypt means 'grief' or 'darkness'. The land of Egypt represents Christ's flesh which was in grief:

*Offering up with a strong cry and tears*; [Heb 5.7]

and in darkness:

*He hath made me to dwell in darkness as those that have been dead of old*. [Ps 142.3]

In this land there were five cities, the five wounds, which are cities of refuge to which anyone fleeing will be freed from death. Fly, then, fly to the fortified cities, outside which anyone found will be slain. Thus Genesis says that all flesh found outside the ark was destroyed by the flood. In the ark alone is life; fly to it, then, as Ruth did to whom Boaz said:

*Mayest thou receive a full reward from the God of Israel,*

*to whom thou art come, and under whose wings thou art fled*. [Ru 2.12]

With arms outstretched on the Cross like two wings, Christ receives those who come to him for refuge and hides them in the safety of his wounds from the assaults of the demons.

There follows: *Speaking the language of Canaan* (which means 'exchange'). The wounds of Christ are like a changed language, speaking of us to the Father not for vengeance but for mercy. As the Apostle writes to the Hebrews:

*You are come... to Jesus the mediator of the new testament,*

*and to the sprinkling of blood which speaketh better than that of Abel*. [Heb 12.22,24]

The blood of Abel cried for vengeance, the blood of Christ cries for mercy. So St Bernard says, "O man, you have safe access to God, seeing that you have the Mother standing before her Son, and the Son before his Father. The Mother shows her heart and breasts to her Son, the Son shows his side and wounds. Where such great signs of love are present, there will be no rejection."

There follows: *One shall be called the city of the sun*. The wound in the side is the city of the sun. In the opening of the Lord's side the gate of paradise was opened, through which there shines the brightness of the eternal light. Natural History tells that blood taken from the side of a dove cleanses a spot from the eye. Likewise, the blood drawn by the soldier's lance from the side of Christ enlightens the eyes of the man born blind (that is, the human race).

9. To this first Advent, the first part of today's Epistle is **concordant**:

*The hour now is to arise from sleep*. [Rom 13.11]

Just as in the last Advent,

*the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall rise again*, [1Cor 15.52]

so in the first Advent the trumpet of preaching sounds: *The hour now is*, etc. This hour is the *year of goodness* [cf. Ps 64.12], the fulness of time when *God sent his son, made of a woman, made under the law* [Gal 6.4]. Let us rise from sleep, then, from the love of temporal things of which Isaiah says:

*Seeing vain things, sleeping and loving dreams*, [Is 56.10]

that is, temporal things which delude sleepers but which are put to flight at the first hour of the day, when the sun rises. The sack-cloth, the humble cloths in which he was wrapped, the rough crib in which he lay, invite us to rise from sleep and reject the darkness. It is the hour for us to arise from sleep.

But woe to us! We cannot and will not watch this one hour with the Lord! The Lord keeps watch, as Jeremiah says:

*I see a rod, watching*. [Jer 1.11]

Jesus Christ is this rod, flexible by his obedience and humility, slender in his poverty, whereby he watched but we are unwilling to keep watch with him. *The men of riches have slept their sleep* [Ps 75.6]; but the riches of men, the humility and poverty of the just, keep watch with the Lord and so are able to say what follows:

*Now our salvation is nearer than when we believed*. [Rom 13.11]

This is what Solomon says in Proverbs:

*The path of the just, as a shining light, goeth forwards,*

*and increaseth even to perfect day*. [Prov 4.18]

'Shining light' refers to 'when we believed'; 'even to perfect day' to 'our salvation is nearer'. The 'shining light' is the Incarnation of the Word, from which faith is derived; 'perfect day' is his Passion, from which our salvation is nearer. "What would it have profited us to be born, if we had not then been redeemed?"

So, beloved brothers, let us suppliantly pray that he who covered himself with sack-cloth in his first Advent, and signed himself with the marks of the Passion to intercede for us: would make us to rise from sleep and keep watch with him, so as to be made worthy to possess the inheritance of eternal salvation in his final Coming. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

**(On the second clause.**

**The theme for a sermon for penitents or religious: *Moses took the blood*.)**

10. There follows, regarding the second Advent: *And in the moon*. The signs in the moon are those St John speaks of in the Apocalypse:

*The whole moon became as blood*; [Apoc 6.12]

and Joel:

*The moon shall be turned into blood*. [Joel 2.31]

God made two luminaries, a greater and a lesser, representing two rational creatures. The greater luminary is the angelic spirit, the lesser luminary is the human soul. It is called 'moon', a single light. The human soul is created to savour heavenly things, and, like those blessed spirits, to praise the Creator and *rejoice with the sons of God* [cf. Job 38.7]. It is from too great a nearness to the earth that it has contracted blackness and lost its brightness; so that if it is to recover it, it must needs first be turned wholly into blood.

The blood is contrition of heart, of which the Apostle writes to the Hebrews:

*Moses took the blood with water and scarlet wool and hyssop; and sprinkled both the book and all the people, saying: This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. The tabernacle also and all the vessels of the ministry, in like manner, he sprinkled with blood; all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission*. [cf. Heb 9.19-22]

See how the whole moon is become as blood! Let us see what is meant, morally, by Moses, blood, water, scarlet wool, hyssop, the book and the people, the tabernacle and the vessels.

When the compassionate and merciful Jesus Christ comes into the soul of the sinner, then *Moses takes the blood*, etc. Moses is the sinner himself, when he has been converted, taken from the waters of Egypt. He must take these four things: the blood of sorrowful contrition, the water of tearful confession, the wool of innocence, scarlet with fraternal charity, and the hyssop of true humility. With these he must sprinkle the book of his heart's secret and the people of his thoughts, the tabernacle of his body and all its vessels, the five senses. In the blood of contrition all things are cleansed, all are forgiven (with the intention of confessing, however). Without the blood of contrition, truly there is no remission of sin.

**(A sermon for enclosed religious: *The glory of Libanus shall come to thee*; and: *In the year that king Ozias died*.)**

11. Let it be said, then: *There will be signs in the moon*. By the outward signs of the penitent the inner marks of contrition are recognised. When chastity of body, humility in work, abstinence in food and lowliness in clothing shine forth, they are the heralds of inner sanctification. Concerning these four, God promises the penitent soul:

*The glory of Libanus shall come to thee,*

*the fir-tree and the box-tree and the pine-tree together,*

*to beautify the place of my sanctuary*. [Is 60.13]

The glory of Libanus is chastity of body, of which the soul glories in Ecclesiasticus:

*I was exalted like a cedar in Libanus*. [Ecclus 24.17]

Libanus means 'whiteness'; the cedar drives away serpents with its scent. In Libanus, then, the soul is exalted like a cedar, because the scent of holy conversation drives away the serpents of the devil's suggestions, and of carnal concupiscence. Again, Isaiah says:

*Over all the glory shall be a protection*. [Is 4.5]

Where there is the glory of chastity, there is the protection of divine mercy, preserving all its works.

The fir-tree is taller than all other trees, and represents humility, which is raised higher than all other virtues. There is a **concordance** in Isaiah:

*In the year that king Ozias died,*

*I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and elevated;*

*'and the house was full of his majesty',*

*and what was below him filled the temple*. [cf. Is 6.1]

King Ozias, proud and leprous, stands for the vice of pride. When this is dead in man, the Lord sits enthroned. The soul of the just is the seat of wisdom, for it is in the soul uplifted by humility, and elevated from earthly things by contemplation of what is eternal, that the Lord rests; and the house of the five senses is filled with his majesty. All the members are quiet when the Lord rests in the mind. So the Lord says:

*And my people shall sit* (when I myself sit therein)

*in the beauty of peace* (as to honesty of life),

*and in the tabernacles of confidence* (as to constancy of conscience),

*and in wealthy rest* (as to the riches of good repute). [Is 32.18]

And therefore there is added that what was below him filled the temple. When the Lord rests in our mind, all the things we do are subject to him, because they are done in humility; and these fill the temple, that is, they build up our neighbour.

The box-tree is pale in colour, and so stands for abstinence from food and drink, of

which Isaiah says:

*The Lord will give you spare bread and short water*; [Is 30.20]

and again:

*The ass-colts that till the ground* (i.e. penitents who afflict their flesh)

*shall eat mingled provender* (barley with straw, meaning rough food). [Is 30.24]

The pine-tree (from which pitch is extracted) represents lowliness in clothing. An empty belly and poor clothing pray fervently to God. We should make amends for our past luxury in food and clothing by means of meagre food and rough garments. As Isaiah says:

*Instead of a sweet smell, there shall be a stench,*

*and instead of a girdle, a cord.*

*And instead of curled hair, baldness,*

*and instead of a stomacher, haircloth*. [Is 3.24]

**(Against the eloquent and wise of this world: *In that day a man shall cast away*; and on the mole and the bat.)**

12. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second Advent:

*The night is past and the day is at hand*. [Rom 13.12]

This is what Isaiah means by:

*The old error is passed away: thou wilt keep peace;*

*peace, because we have hoped in thee, Lord*. [Is 26.3[

Night and error both stand for the blindness of sin. Day and peace stand for the illumination of grace. The repetition of the word ‘peace’ indicates the inward and outward peace that a man has when the Lord sits on his high and elevated throne.

There follows: *Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness*. [Rom 13.12]

This is what Isaiah means by:

*In that day a man shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold,*

*which he had made for himself to adore, moles and bats*. [Is 2.20]

Note that silver stands for eloquence and gold for wisdom, the mole for avarice and the bat for vainglory. The mole lacks eyes and digs in the earth; the bat does not see in the daytime, because it lacks the crystalline fluid and has its wings fastened to its feet. The carnal man, who savours earthly things, makes idols for himself from the silver of eloquence and the gold of wisdom: the moles of avarice and the bats of vainglory, which are the works of darkness. Avarice lacks the light of holy poverty and digs in the earth, loving earthly things. Vainglory, while pleasing to the human day, does not see the divine day. Its wings (the works whereby it would fly to heaven) are fastened to its feet, its carnal affections. It wants to be seen and praised by men. Alas! How many preachers and prelates of today make themselves idols from the eloquence and wisdom that God has given them, and adore them? They seek to get rich, to be honoured, to be called 'Rabbi' and to be saluted in the public squares [cf. Mt 23.7].

But in that day, the illumination of grace of which it is said: *the day is at hand*, a man casts away the moles and bats, which do not see the light and therefore represent the works of darkness. Then the words which follow are fulfilled: *And let us put on the armour of light* [Rom 13.12].

**(For penitents: *Arise, arise*.)**

13. This is what Isaiah means by:

*Arise, arise, put on thy strength, O Sion;*

*put on the garments of thy glory, O Jerusalem, the city of the Holy One*. [Is 52.1]

Sion and Jerusalem stand for the soul which, when it sins, is taken prisoner by the devil. When it does penance it is lifted and raised up. Rise, then, in contrition; rise in confession; put on the strength of final perseverance; put on the garments of your glory, the two-fold charity: and so you will be the city of the Holy Spirit.

There follows: *Let us walk honestly, as in the day*. [Rom 13.13]

Isaiah says of this:

*The glory of the Lord... shall be seen upon thee,*

*and the Gentiles shall walk in thy light,*

*and kings in the brightness of thy rising*. [Is 60.1-3]

The Gentiles are the bodily senses, the kings are the affections of the mind. The former walk in the light of honest conversation, the latter in the splendour of purity, when the soul of man is enlightened by the glory of the Lord.

There follows: *Not in rioting and drunkenness*. [Rom 13.13]

Of these, Isaiah says:

*They are swallowed up with wine, they have gone astray in drunkenness,*

*they have not known him that seeth* (i.e. God, who sees all things),

*they have been ignorant of judgement.*

*For all tables were full of vomit and filth, so that there was no more place*. [Is 28.7-8]

*Not in chambering and impurities*.

Isaiah says:

*It shall be the habitation of dragons, and the pasture of ostriches*, etc. [Is 9.20]

See the Gospel: *Jesus was led into the desert* [Lent I].

*Not in contention and envy*.

Isaiah says:

*Everyone shall eat the flesh of his own arm* (will savage his neighbour in contention and envy)

*Manasses Ephraim and Ephraim Manasses* (the laity against the clergy and vice versa)

*and they together shall be against Juda* (i.e. religious). [Is 9.20]

*But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ*.

Isaiah says:

*He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation* (i.e. the virtues)

*and he hath covered me with the robe of justice* (i.e. Jesus Christ). [Is 61.10]

*For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ* [Gal 3.27].

Therefore, beloved brothers, let us devoutly pray him to turn the moon of our soul wholly into the blood of contrition, whereby we may cast off the works of darkness and walk in the day, and put on Him who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

**(On the third clause.**

**The theme for a sermon on the point of death or for the burial of the dead: *He shall look upwards*.)**

14. There follows, regarding the third Advent: *And in the stars*.

The signs in the stars are those spoken of by John in the Apocalypse;

*The stars from heaven fell upon the earth, as the fig-tree casteth its green figs when it is shaken by a great wind*. [Apoc 6.13]

Isaiah says of a man labouring at the point of death:

*He shall look upwards, and he shall look to the earth;*

*and behold trouble and darkness, weakness and distress, and a mist following him:*

*and he cannot fly away from his distress*. [Is 8.21-22]

At the point of death there is the trouble of sickness, darkness in the eyes (which are then, so it is said, deprived of light), weakness in the limbs and the distress of death; and the mist which follows is the fear of hell, or the presence of the devil scheming to snatch the soul as it departs. Alas! Wretched man! Whether he looks up or looks to the earth, he cannot fly from his distress! He must fall to the ground and return to the earth. So Isaiah says:

*Babylon is fallen, she is fallen* (that is, man's flesh),

*and all the graven gods thereof* (the delights of its senses)

*are broken unto the ground*. [Is 21.9]

For, *Earth thou art and unto earth shalt thou return* [Gen 3.19]. This is what is meant by: *The stars* (living men) *fell from heaven* (the firmament, that firm state wherein they thought to stand firm and live long) *upon the earth* from which they were created.

*As the fig-tree*, etc. The fig-tree is human nature, which, when it is shaken by the great wind of death ‘casts its green figs’, that is, loses its senses and limbs and becomes useless. These, then, are the signs in the stars. Blessed will be that servant whom the Lord shall find watching, when he comes and knocks at the door [cf. Lk 12.36-7].

**(Against the lustful and gluttonous: *You shall be ashamed of the gardens*.)**

15. Happy is he who can sing in the hour of his death what is sung in the Introit of today's Mass:

*To thee I have lifted up my soul* [Ps 24.1].

This is what Isaiah means by:

*Arise, arise, stand up O Jerusalem*. [Is 51.17]

O soul, arise from the allurements of your flesh; arise from the concupiscence of the world; stand up for eternal joys. He who thus lifts up his soul to God will be safe at the point of death.

*In thee, O my God, I put my trust*.

This is what Isaiah means by:

*And it shall come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel...*

*shall lean no more upon him that striketh them* (Assyria; i.e. the devil)

*but they shall lean upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel*. [Is 10.20]

*In thee I trust*, he says, not in the flesh, not in the world. Isaiah says of this trust:

*Lo! thou trusteth upon this broken staff of a reed, upon Egypt:*

*upon which, if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it*. [Is 36.6]

Worldly wealth and bodily health are like a reed rooted in the mud, beautiful on the

outside but hollow within. If a man leans upon this reed, at death it breaks; and, being broken, wounds the soul which, so wounded, falls into hell.

There follows: *Let me not be ashamed*.

Truly, truly, whoever puts his trust in the Lord while he lives, will not be ashamed in the hour of death, but will exult and say with Isaiah:

*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, and my soul shall be joyful in my God*. [Is 61.10]

On the other hand, Isaiah curses those who put their trust in the world:

*You shall be ashamed of the gardens which you have chosen,*

*when you shall be as an oak with the leaves falling off, and as a garden without water.*

*And your strength shall be as the ashes of tow, and your work as a spark.*

*And both shall burn together: and there shall be none to quench it*. [Is 1.29-31]

At the end of their life, carnal people will be ashamed of the gardens of greed and lust which they chose while they lived. They will be stripped and dried up like an oak with the leaves falling off- riches and pleasures. They will be like a garden without water, for all pleasure will cease. The water of worldly pleasure will not run through the channels of the senses to arouse the concupiscence of the flesh. Then their strength, the pride in which they trusted, will be as the ashes of tow which is very quickly consumed; and their work will be as a spark lasting no time at all. Both the strength of pride and the work of avarice will be burned by the demons, and there will be no-one to quench it. So Isaiah says:

*Their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched*. [Is 66.24]

There follows: *Neither let my enemies laugh at me*.

Jeremiah speaks of this laughter in Lamentations:

*All they that passed by the way have clapped their hands at thee:*

*they have hissed and wagged their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying:*

*Is this the city of perfect beauty, the joy of all the earth?*

*All thy enemies have opened their mouth against thee:*

*they have hissed and gnashed with the teeth, and have said:*

*Lo, this is the day which we looked for, we have found it, we have seen it*. [Lam 2.15-16]

Those who have put their trust in the Lord will be safe from this laughter at the end of their life; he himself has promised them in Isaiah:

*You shall go out with joy* (from the body),

*and be led forth with peace* (to the heavenly homeland).

*The mountains and the hills* (the angels and the apostles)

*shall sing praise before you*:

*and all the trees of the country* (the souls of the saints)

*shall clap their hands*, [Is 55.12]

at your company, exulting and praising the Son of God together.

Let us then devoutly ask him, beloved brothers, that when the last day comes and the end of our life, he would free us from the mockery of the demons and make us to go forth in joy, and be led in peace by the hands of the angels. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

**(On the fourth clause.**

**The theme for a sermon on the day of Judgement and on the damnation of sinners: *With breaking shall the earth be broken*; and: *Howl ye, for the day of the Lord is near*; and: *The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man*; and: *The sword of the Lord is filled with blood*.)**

16. There follows, regarding the fourth Advent: *And upon the earth distress of nations*.

Isaiah says of this distress:

*With breaking shall the earth be broken,*

*with crushing shall the earth be crushed,*

*with trembling shall the earth be moved,*

*with shaking shall the earth be shaken as a drunken man*. [Is 24.19-20]

Just as a drunkard does not know what he is doing, so all those who are turned into the land of the wicked will be drunkards in their greatness, and bewildered at everything. This earth, or land, is mentioned four times, signifying four kinds of sinner: the proud, the lustful, the avaricious and the wrathful. The proud will be broken, as in:

*The Lord shall break the grinders of the lions*. [Ps 57.7]

The lustful will be crushed, as Jeremiah says:

*The Lord will crush them with a double crushing*, [Jer 17.18]

so that those who sinned in soul and flesh will be punished in both. The avaricious will tremble, as in Job:

*They shall be as chaff before the face of the wind,*

*and as ashes which the whirlwind scattereth*. [Job 21.18]

The wrathful will be shaken, as Job says again:

*I have seen those who work iniquity, and sow sorrows, and reap them,*

*perishing by the blast of God, and consumed by the spirit of his wrath*. [Job 4.8-9]

There follows: *By reason of the confusion of the roaring of the sea and of the waves*.

So Isaiah says:

*It shall be at an instant suddenly. A visitation shall come from the Lord of hosts in thunder,*

*and with earthquake, and with a great noise of whirlwind and tempest,*

*and with the flame of devouring fire*. [Is 29.6]

The elements will avenge their Author. The downfall of the damned will be sudden. As the Apostle says to the Thessalonians:

*The Day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night. For when they shall say: Peace and security; then shall sudden destruction come upon them, as the pains upon her that*

*is with child. And they shall not escape*. [1Thess 5.2]

Suddenly, as the Apocalypse says:

*Surely, I come quickly. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus*. [Apoc 22.20]

Then the sinner will be visited with thunder from on high, and the quaking of the earth. Overburdened with the weight of his sins, it will shake him off it. And there will be a great noise of a whirlwind from the air, and tempest from the sea. Where, then, shall the wretch fly? Where shall he hide himself? If he wants to ascend to heaven, he will be thrown back by the thunder. If he takes to the air, the whirlwind will crush him. If he stays on the earth, he will not be able to bear its quaking; for, as Job says:

*The earth shall rise up against him*. [Job 20.27]

If he wants to enter the sea, he will be thrown up by its waves. What is left for the wretch, then, for whom no place is to be found in all the world, except to fall into the abyss of flame and devouring fire? Of this, Job says:

*A fire that is not kindled shall devour him*. [Job 20.26]

17. There follows:

*Men withering away for fear, and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world*.

This is what Isaiah says:

*Howl ye, for the day of the Lord is near: it shall come as a destruction from the Lord.*

*Therefore shall all hands be faint: and every heart of man shall melt, and shall be broken.*

*Gripings and pains shall take hold of them: they shall be in pain as a woman in labour.*

*Everyone shall be amazed at his neighbour: their countenances shall be as faces burnt.*

*Behold, the day of the Lord shall come, a cruel day, and full of indignation and of wrath and fury,*

*to lay the land desolate, and to destroy the sinners thereof out of it.*

*For the stars of heaven and their brightness shall not display their light;*

*the sun shall be darkened in his rising, and the moon shall not shine with her light.*

*And I will visit evils upon the world, and their iniquity against the wicked:*

*and I will make the pride of infidels to cease,*

*and I will bring down the arrogancy of the mighty*. [Is 13.6-11]

There follows: *For the powers of the heavens shall be moved*, that is, in amazement. So Isaiah says:

*All the host of the heavens shall pine away,*

*and the heavens shall be folded together as a book*. [Is 34.4]

The Gloss says: "This air will be rolled up in fire, and will seem to be folded like a book. After all sins have been laid bare and abandoned, the books which were opened will be folded up, and sins shall no more be written in them. Hence Daniel says: *The judgement sat and the books were opened.*"

[Dan 7.10]

*And then they shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and majesty*.

Note these words, power and majesty: there will be power with respect to the damned, majesty with respect to the saved. We shall speak of both.

18. Regarding power, there is a **concordance** in Isaiah:

*The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man:*

*as a man of war shall he stir up zeal* (meaning ‘vengeance’)

*He shall shout and cry: he shall prevail against his enemies.*

*I have always held my peace, I have kept silence, I have been patient.*

*I will speak now as a woman in labour: I will destroy, and swallow up at once.*

*I will lay waste the mountains and hills, and will make all their grass to wither*. [Is 42.13-14]

The Lord held his peace when he was led like a sheep to his Passion. He kept silent

even under the scourges; as Job says: *The rod of God is not upon thee* [Job 21.9]. He was patient, waiting for repentance; as Ecclesiasticus: *Overlooking the sins of men for the sake of repentance* [Wisd 11.24]. But in the judgement he will speak like a woman in labour, uttering the pain he had concealed. Then he will scatter the heaps of riches, and swallow up their power. He will *lay waste mountains and hills*, the pride both of prelates and of their subjects; and he will dry up every seed of greed and lust.

Isaiah also says of this power:

*The sword of the Lord is filled with blood.*

*It is made thick with the blood of lambs and buck-goats,*

*with the blood of rams full of marrow:*

*for there is a victim of the Lord in Bosra, and a great slaughter in the land of Edom.*

*And the unicorns shall go down with them, and the bulls with the mighty:*

*their land shall be soaked with blood, and their ground with the fat of fat ones.*

*For it is the day of the vengeance of the Lord,*

*the year of recompense of the judgement of Sion.*

*And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the ground thereof into brimstone:*

*and the land thereof shall become burning pitch.*

*Night and day, it shall not be quenched:*

*the smoke thereof shall go up for ever, from generation to generation*. [Is 34.6-10]

In the day of judgement, *the Lord's sword* (his power as he avenges himself on his enemies)

*will be filled with blood and made thick* (as it punishes the sins and opulence of carnal folk)

*with the blood of lambs* (hypocrites who are like wolves in sheep's clothing)

*and buck-goats* (the lustful),

*and rams full of marrow* (fat abbots and priors who lead the flock).

The Lord's 'victim' (his vengeance) *will be in Bosra* ('fortified', meaning the quarrelsome and lax congregations of enclosed religious, fortified by a wall on the outside but exposed within to every passing vice. As Isaiah says:

*Thou hast laid thy body on the ground and as a way to them that went over* [Is 51.23]).

*There will be great slaughter in the land of Edom* ('bloody' or 'earthy', meaning clergy who are defiled with the blood of lust and the earth of money.)

*The unicorns* (kings and rulers of the earth)

*and bulls* (mitred bishops, who have two horns on their heads, like bulls),

all these who have not done true penance for their sins, *will go down with the mighty* (the principalities and powers of this world)

*to hell*, the land of the dead, which will be *soaked with their blood and fat* (their malice and pride).

The remaining details of the text need no explanation.

19. Regarding the majesty of the Lord, there is a **concordance** in Isaiah:

*The Lord shall be unto thee for an everlasting light:*

*and the days of thy mourning shall be ended*, [Is 60.20]

because the earlier distresses are given to oblivion, and they are hidden from the eyes of those who in this life have waited for him in holiness and justice as he comes to judgement. Of these, the Introit of the Mass continues:

*None of them that wait on thee shall be confounded*. [Ps 24.3]

Truly, truly, Lord: they will not be confounded, rather they will be lifted up for ever. You promise, in Isaiah, regarding their glory and the punishment of the wicked:

*Behold, my servants shall eat, and you shall be hungry:*

*behold, my servants shall drink, and you shall be thirsty.*

*Behold, my servants shall rejoice, and you shall be confounded:*

*behold, my servants shall praise for joyfulness of heart,*

*and you shall cry for sorrow of heart and shall howl for grief of spirit*. [Is 65.13-14]

Let us then, beloved brothers, ask the Lord Jesus Christ that, when he comes in great power and majesty on the last judgement day, to render to each according to his deeds: he will not exercise his power upon us with the damned, but by his majesty make us blessed with the blessed; that we may eat and drink with them, rejoice and exult in the kingdom of heaven. May he grant this, who is blessed and glorious for ever and ever. Let every blessed soul say, Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

1 ROMAN BREVIARY, First Sunday in Advent, 5th antiphon at Lauds.

2 cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Is 28.21

3 BERNARD= ERNALDUS, Abbot of Bona Valle, *De laudibus B.V.M.*; PL 189.1726

4 ROMAN MISSAL, Holy Saturday, the *Exultet*.

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

**(The Gospel for the second Sunday in Advent: *When John had heard*; which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon at the beginning of the fast: *Shake thyself from the dust*.)**

1. At that time: *When John had heard in prison the works of Christ*, etc.

Isaiah says:

*Shake thyself from the dust, arise, sit up, O Jerusalem:*

*Loose the bonds from off thy neck, O captive daughter of Sion*. [Is 52.2]

Note these four words: ‘shake’, ‘arise’, ‘sit’, ‘loose’. The dust which is blown about by the force of the wind stands for the concupiscence of the flesh, which under the impulse of the devil’s suggestions is seized by various sins. As Job says: *A burning wind shall take him up* [Job 27.21]. Of this dust, Isaiah says:

*Dust shall be the serpent’s food* (meaning the devil). [Is 65.25]

So that the devil may not eat you along with the dust, you, Jerusalem (the soul), should shake yourself from the dust, from the pleasure of your flesh. *Shake off the dust from your feet*, says the Lord [Mt 10.14]. *Shall dust confess to thee?* [Ps 29.10] Arise, mind and body together, to works of penance. As Solomon says:

*Take away the rust from silver* (that is, shake off the dust)

*and there shall come forth a most pure vessel*, (that is, arise)

*and sit*. [Prov 25.4] (that is, rest from the tumult of the world)

And Isaiah says:

*If you return and be quiet, you shall be saved*. [Is 30.15]

Loose the bonds from off thy neck: the last words correspond to the first. They teach the same thing, so that it may stick more firmly in your memory. The pleasure of the flesh and the vanity of the world are bonds with which the soul is held captive, chained by the neck, so that it may not go out into the freedom of confession. Loose, then, the bonds from your neck. These are the bonds referred to in today's Gospel: *When John had heard in prison the works of Christ*.

2. There are three things to note in this Gospel. The first is John's imprisonment: *When John heard*. The second is Christ's working of miracles: *Go and relate*. The third is the commendation of blessed John: *What went you out to see*, etc.

The Introit of the Mass is: *People of Sion*; and the Epistle of blessed Paul to the Romans is read: *What things soever were written*; which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the three clauses of the Gospel. The first part is: *What things soever*; the second: *Receive one another*; the third: *The God of hope*.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(On the four roots of sin: *Woe to the sinful nation*.)**

3. Let us say, then:

*When John had heard in prison the works of Christ: sending to of his disciples he said to him: Art thou he that art to come, or look we for another?* [Mt 11.2-3]

The same Evangelist tells that:

*Herod had apprehended John and bound him and put him in prison, because of Herodias, his brother's wife. For John had said to him: It is not lawful for thee to have her*. [Mt 14.3-4]

Note: let us see what Herod, Herodias, John and his bonds, and the two disciples stand for morally. Herod is the world, Herodias the flesh, John the human spirit, the bonds vanity and pleasure, the two disciples hope and fear.

Herod and Herodias mean 'glory of the skin'. The world and the flesh glory in outward beauty, of which Isaiah says:

*What will you do in the day of visitation,*

*and of the calamity which cometh from afar?*

*To whom will ye flee for help?*

*And where will ye leave your glory?* [Is 10.3]

Also:

*Under* (that is, in hell) *his glory* (of the world and the flesh) *shall be kindled a burning,*

*as it were the burning of a fire*. [Is 10.16]

So he says further:

*He will toss thee like a ball into a large and spacious country;*

(meaning hell, which *hath enlarged her soul and opened her mouth without any bounds* [Is 5.14])

*There shalt thou die; and there shall the chariot of thy glory be*. [Is 22.18]

John means ‘the grace of the Lord’, and he stands for the human spirit which receives the grace of the Lord in Baptism. There is a **concordance** in Isaiah:

*I will pour out waters upon the thirsty ground and streams upon the dry land:*

*I will pour out my spirit upon thy seed and my blessing upon thy stock.*

*And they shall spring up among the herbs, as willows beside the running waters.*

*One shall say: I am the Lord’s; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob:*

*and another shall subscribe with his hand, To the Lord,*

*and surname himself by the name of Israel*. [Is 44.3-5]

The thirsty and dry ground is the soul before Baptism. The Apostle says*: We were by nature children of wrath* [Eph 2.3]. But the Lord pours out the baptismal water, pours out his Spirit and his blessing, and from children of wrath makes children of grace, seed and stock children of Holy Church; they *spring up among the herbs* (the saints) *like willows* (green-growing with virtues) *beside the running waters* of gifts and graces. *One shall say: I am the Lord’s*. Behold John, the grace of God! *Another* (another faithful) *shall call himself* (to penance, as John did) *by the name of Jacob* (that is, as a supplanter of vice);

*and he will write with his hand* (his work), *To the Lord* (that is, to the Lord's honour). And he will *surname himself by the name of Israel*, that is, according to Israel's name, 'the man who sees God', now in faith and hope, hereafter in reality.

4. Herod and Herodias, the world and the flesh, bind this John (thus enlightened by the grace of the Lord) with their bonds of worldly vanity and the pleasure of the flesh. The vanity of the world consists in pride and avarice; the pleasure of the flesh in gluttony and lust. Of these four Isaiah says:

*Woe to the sinful nation* (to the sin of pride),

*a people laden with iniquity* (avarice),

*a wicked seed* (gluttony),

*ungracious children* (lust). [Is 1.4]

See with what bonds our spirit is held captive!

But what is to be done amidst these? What today's Gospel tells us: *When John had heard in prison the works of Christ*, etc. The works of Christ are Creation and Re-creation. To these there is a **concordance** in Isaiah:

*The harp and the lyre and the timbrel and wine are in your feasts,*

(this means the pleasures of the five senses, as we treated some way previously [Pentecost I])

*and the works of the Lord you regard not,*

*nor do you consider the works of his hands*. [Is 5.12]

The work of the Lord is Creation; when well considered it sends the man who looks on it on to the consideration of his Creator. If there is so much beauty in a creature, how much more must be in the Creator? The wisdom of the craftsman shines forth in the material. But those devoted to the senses do not look; *nor do they consider the works of his hands*, which were pierced by the nails upon the Cross. With hands fastened to the Cross he made war on the devil and snatched the human race from his hands.

When our imprisoned spirit hears these works of Christ, it should straightaway send two of its disciples. It hears, I say, with the inner ear of the heart, by the inspiration of the Spirit who breathes into it, or with the outer ear of the body, by the voice of a preacher. When it so hears, it should send hope and fear to Jesus, saying to him: *Are you*, who created be and re-created me, made me and redeemed me, *he that is to come* to judge

me according to my works (and that is why I fear your justice), *or do we look for another* to judge the world in equity? Not in the least! He who made and redeemed will himself judge. As he said: *He has given all judgement to the Son* [Jn 5.22].

5. The first part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this first clause: *What things soever were written*, etc. Whence the Lord said to Isaiah:

*Now therefore go in and write for them upon box, and note it diligently in a book:*

*and it shall be in the latter day for a testimony for ever*. [Is 30.8]

He said, *Upon box*, that it may remain *for ever*. The sum of all the things written for our learning consists chiefly in three things: creation, redemption and the examination of the final judgement. Creation and redemption teach us to love God, the last judgement teaches us to fear him.

*That through patience and the comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope*. [Rom 15.4]

Hear how Scripture comforts one who suffers tribulation. The Lord says in Isaiah:

*When thou shalt pass through the waters, I will be with thee:*

*and the rivers shall not cover thee.*

*When thou shalt walk in the fire, thou shalt not be burnt;*

*and the flames shall not burn in thee.*

*For I am the Lord thy God*. [Is 42.2-3]

And again:

*Fear not, thou worm of Jacob, you that are dead of Israel.*

*I have helped thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel*. [Is 41.14]

And again:

*I, I myself, will comfort you.*

*Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a mortal man,*

*and of the son of man who shall wither away like grass?* [Is 51.12]

There follows: *Now the God of patience*

(who says in Isaiah: I have held my peace, I have kept silence, I have been patient [Is 42.14])

*and of comfort*

(who also says: *I will comfort you, and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. You shall see and your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb*- [Is 66.13-14] meaning, your bodies shall live again in immortality)

*grant you to be of one mind towards one another, according to Jesus Christ;*

*that with one mind, and with one mouth,*

*you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. [Rom 15.5-6]

This is what Isaiah means by:

*(Two seraphim) cried one to another and said:*

*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts;*

*all the earth is full of his glory*. [Is 6.3]

The seraphim are burning spirits. They are those who are ablaze with two-fold charity, who are of one mind, one towards another, according to Jesus Christ. So the words: *God grant you to be of one mind*, etc. mean the same as: *Two seraphim cried one to another*; and the words: *That with one mind and with one mouth you may glorify*; mean the same as: *And they said: Holy, holy, holy*, etc.

Let us then, beloved brothers, ask the Lord Jesus Christ to free our spirit from the bonds of the world and the flesh; so that with one mind and one mouth we may be enabled to honour and glorify him, whose glory fills the whole earth. To him be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

**(On the second clause.**

**The theme for a sermon against the proud: *Who is blind?*)**

6. There follows, secondly: *Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen*. [Mt 11.4]

This text refutes the error of those heretics who say that John was damned, because he doubted Christ, saying : Art thou he who art to come, and died in prison in that doubt, before the return of the disciples he had sent. May that cursed tongue be dumb! John did not doubt Christ, to whom he had borne witness, saying: Behold the Lamb of God! But to confirm his disciples' faith in Christ, he sent them to ask, so that when they had seen his miracles they would not doubt the rest. It was not to answer John's question, but to strengthen the hearts of his disciples, that the Lord said: *The blind see*, etc. St Gregory says, "John did not doubt that he was the Redeemer of the world; he asked, to know whether he who had come into the world by his own power would descend even to hell by his own power."

The objection that John died before the disciples returned is clearly shown to be false from the words of the holy Gospel. Either the Lord commanded John's disciples something impossible, or something possible, when he said: *Go and relate*. The Lord never commands what is impossible; but if John had died in prison before the disciples had returned, the Lord would have commanded the impossible: *Go, and relate*. To whom should they relate? To a dead man? Of course not. It is certain, then, that the disciples found John alive, and told him what they had heard and seen. The Lord always commands what is possible.

There follows:

*The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them*. [Mt 11.5]

Let us see what these six things represent morally. The 'blind' are the proud, the 'lame' are hypocrites, the 'lepers' are the lustful, the 'deaf' the avaricious, the 'dead' the gluttonous and the 'poor' are the humble.

7. *The blind see*. This is what Isaiah says:

*Out of darkness and obscurity the eyes of the blind shall see*. [Is 29.18]

And:

*Who is blind, but he that is sold? Or who is blind, but the servant of the Lord?*

*Thou that seest many things, wilt thou not observe them?* [Is 42.19-20]

Who are blind (that is, proud) today, if not those who are called servants of the Lord, and who seem to serve the Lord, namely religious and clergy? Who are the proud, if not those who see many things in the Scriptures, who teach and preach many things, but observe none of them? They see so much for others, but nothing for themselves.

Of the pride of all these, Isaiah says under the type of the ‘Valley of vision’:

*What aileth these also, that thou too art wholly gone up to the housetops?*

*Full of clamour, a populous city, a joyous city*. [Is 22.1-2]

He says, in effect: It is tolerable for secular folk to seek advancement, but why do we see you religious and educated people, who see so much, pursuing ambition and going up onto the housetops of pride, full of clamour? Pride is a noisy thing. Isaiah says:

*Woe to the multitude of many people, like the multitude of the roaring sea*. [Is 17.12]

On the other hand, Isaiah says of the humble Christ:

*He shall not cry... neither shall his voice be heard abroad*. [Is 42.2]

Regarding the populous city, the joyous city, Isaiah says:

*Upon the land of my people* (the humble mind)

*shall thorns and briars come up* (griefs and pains);

*How much more upon all the houses of joy,*

*of the city that rejoiced?* [Is 32.13]

That is, rejoiced in their pride which blinded the eyes of their minds, lest they see the city of eternal joy. Isaiah says of that city:

*Look upon Sion, the city of our solemnity:*

*thy eyes shall see Jerusalem, a rich habitation*. [Is 33.20]

To be able to see it, anoint your eyes with the salve of humility, and you will be worthy to hear: Look, your humility has enlightened you. Thus, *the blind see*.

**(Against the hypocrites: *The lame walk*.)**

8. There follows: *The lame walk*. A lame man limps as he walks. The hypocrite goes limping along in the way of his conversation. *He who does evil hates the light, that his works may not be reproved by the light* [cf. Jn 3.20]. So Isaiah says:

*Woe to you that are deep of heart* (i.e. who conceal your wickedness)

*to hide your counsel from the Lord!*

*And their works are in the dark, and they say: Who seeth us, and who knoweth us?* [Is 29.15]

The hypocrite limps on one foot. He holds one foot in the air and puts the other on the ground. With shabby clothing, a humble voice and a pale face, he lifts one foot off the ground; but since he wants to be praised for these things and seem a saint, he undoubtedly has the other foot firmly on the ground.

Alternatively. The second book of Kings tells that Mephiboseth was lame in both feet [cf. 2Kg(Sm) 4.4]. His name means ‘man of shame’, and he represents those who are ‘lame in both feet’, namely in desire and deed. Those who limp like that deserve eternal shame.

Isaiah says of this:

*The king of the Assyrians shall lead away the captivity of Egypt,*

*and the exile of Ethiopia,*

*young and old, naked and barefoot,*

*with their buttocks uncovered to the shame of Egypt*. [Is 21.4]

The ‘king of the Assyrians’ is the devil, and he will lead away to hell the captivity of Egypt, that is, those whom he has held captive in sin; and the exile of Ethiopia, those who have gone into exile from virtue to vice; the young who are vigorous in evil, and the old who are *grown old in evil days*; those stripped naked of the wedding garment, without the blue shoe of heavenly longing on the ‘foot’ of affective desire (Ezekiel says: *I shod thee with violet-coloured shoes* [Ez 16.10]) or the shoe of mortification on the foot of effective action (as in Ruth: *Put off thy shoe; and immediately he took it off from his foot* [Ru 4.8]). And, as Deuteronomy says*: His house shall be called in Israel the house of the unshod* [Dt 25.10]. He will lead them, I say, with buttocks uncovered to show their disgrace to all, to the shame of ‘Egypt’, the lovers of this world. Those who want to avoid this fate should take the proper steps with their feet, putting on the shoes of affection by good will, and of effective action by humility; then they will deserve to hear: *the lame walk*.

**(Against the lustful: *Naaman was a great man*.)**

9. *The lepers are cleansed*. The fourth book of Kings tells that *Naaman was a great man and rich, but a leper* [cf. 4(2)Kg 5.1]; for where riches and pleasure abound, there will be

the leprosy of lust. When Isaiah says:

*Their land is filled with silver and gold: and there is no end of their treasures*,

he straightaway adds:

*and their land is filled with horses*, [Is 2.7-8]

meaning the lustful. Exodus recounts the making of the golden calf [Ex 32.4], because from the gold of abundance the calf of wanton lust is formed. Isaiah says of it:

*There the calf shall feed:*

*and there he shall lie down and shall consume its branches*. [Is 27.10]

This, too, is what Job says about lust:

*It is a fire that devoureth even to destruction,*

*and rooteth up all things that spring*. [Job 31.12]

Wash yourselves, then, you lepers, and be clean. Take away the evil of lustful desires from the eyes of the Lord; cease to do perversely [cf. Is 1.16] in your bodies, that it may be said of you: *the lepers are cleansed*.

**(Against the avaricious: *The deaf hear*.)**

10. There follows: *the deaf hear*. This is what Isaiah says:

*In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book*. [Is 29.18]

Deafness is a kind of ‘defilement’ in the ears, whereby the channels of the hearing are blocked up. The ‘deaf’ are the avaricious and usurers, whose ears are blocked up with the filth of money. So the Psalm says:

*Their madness is according to the likeness of a serpent:*

*like the deaf asp that stoppeth her ears*. [Ps 57.5]

It is said that a serpent, so as not to hear the snake-charmer’s voice, puts one ear to the ground and stops the other with its tail. The ‘ear’ listens ear-nestly as it h-ears a sound.

The unhappy miser or usurer deprives himself of such a great gift of nature and grace, when, so as not to earnestly listen to or hear the sound of the preacher, he stops up the ears of his heart with the 'earth' (money that he has already got) and his 'tail' (his vile ambition to get more). If people of this sort want to hear the words of a book (namely the Gospel, which says*: Blessed are the poor*), they shake out of their heart's ears the 'earth' of ill-gotten gain, and entirely pull out the 'tail' of acquisitiveness. Then it may be said of them: *The deaf hear*.

**(Against the gluttonous: *The dead are raised*.)**

11. There follows: *The dead rise again*. This is what Isaiah says:

*Thy dead men shall live, my slain shall rise again*. [Is 26.19]

The 'dead' are the gluttonous. *Their throat is an open sepulchre* [Ps 5.11], in which they lie buried like the dead. So Isaiah says:

*These also have been ignorant through wine,*

*and through drunkenness have erred:*

*the priest and the prophet have been ignorant through drunkenness.*

*They are swallowed up with wine*. [I 28.7]

Just as the morsel of bread, even as it absorbs the wine, is absorbed by the wine and sinks to the bottom of the chalice: so these are swallowed up even as they swallow, and are buried in the hell of their bellies. The rich man who feasted sumptuously every day was, in a sense, buried in hell even while he lived; while Lazarus the beggar lay at the door outside, not inside [cf. Lk 16.19-20]. The starving man lay outside the door, the pleasure of the five senses. And, as the Apostle says, the Lord suffered 'outside the gate' [cf. Heb 13.12]. But the rich man buried himself daily in hell, within his own doors. *Who shall confess the in the hell* of the belly, Lord? [cf. Ps 6.6] *Neither shall the dead praise thee, O Lord* [Ps 113.17].

Those who want to praise must go out from the tomb of the belly, from the darkness and chaos of hell into the light of abstinence in food and drink. Isaiah says of this:

*Awake, and give praise, ye that dwell in the dust.*

*For thy dew is the dew of the light*. [Is 26.19]

Just as dew cools the heat and light dispels the darkness, so abstinence cools the heat of gluttony and vice, and dispels the darkness of the mind. And so *the dead rise again* to

life.

**(For the poor in spirit, religious and enclosed: *The Lord will comfort Sion*.)**

12. There follows: *The poor have the gospel preached to them*. Isaiah says of them:

*The first-born of the poor shall be fed, and the poor shall rest with confidence*. [Is 14.30]

And:

*The meek shall increase their joy in the Lord:*

*and the poor men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel*. [Is 29.19]

Only the poor, that is, the humble, have the Gospel preached to them, because what is hollow can receive what is poured in, while what is swollen repels what is poured. The Lord says: *Let him who thirsts come and drink* [cf. Jn 7.37], because as he says himself in Isaiah:

*I will pour out water upon the thirsty ground,*

*and streams upon the dry land*. [Is 44.3]

Today the poor, the simple, the uneducated- peasants and old folk- thirst for the word of life, the water of saving wisdom. The citizens of Babylon, who get drunk from the golden chalice of the great Whore, the wise counsellors of Pharao who (as Job says*) are full of words, and the spirit of their bowels straitens them*, and their belly is full of new wine that wants vent and bursts the new vessels [cf. Job 32.18-19]- believe me, it is not people like that, but only the poor, who *have the Gospel preached to them*.

13. There follows: *And blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in me* [Mt 11.6].

Christ is the Truth. In Christ were poverty, obedience and humility. Whoever is scandalized in these, or about these, is scandalized in Christ. The true poor are not scandalized, because they alone have the Gospel preached to them, and are fed with the word of the Gospel, because they are *the people of the Lord and the sheep of his pasture* [cf. Ps 94.7].

It is of this people that the Introit of today's Mass sings: *People of Sion, behold the Lord will come and save the nations*. This is what Isaiah says:

*The first shall say to Sion: I am here* (to help you),

*and to Jerusalem* (the Church)

*I will give an evangelist*, [Is 41.27]

a herald of good news to preach the Gospel to the poor, so that the nations may be saved by the Gospel, and the Lord shall make the glory of his praise to be heard in the joy of your hearts [cf. Is 30.30]

14. This is what Isaiah says:

*The Lord will comfort Sion; and will comfort all the ruins thereof.*

*And he will make her desert as a place of pleasure*

*and her wilderness as the garden of the Lord.*

*Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of praise*. [Is 51.3]

Sion means ‘a watchtower’. The people of Sion are the poor in spirit, who are raised up from earthly things and made a watchtower upon the height of poverty, and contemplate the Son of God, a pilgrim in the way and glorious in his homeland. The Lord comforts this Sion; the Lord comforts those bereft of temporal goods with his own good things, adding: *and will comfort all the ruins thereof*. When the building of worldly comfort falls into ruin, the Lord at once raises up the house of inner comfort. *And he will make her desert as a place of pleasure*. He makes the desert of outward poverty a place of pleasure by inner sweetness. The Lord calls the riches of this world thorns [cf. Mt 13.22]. Isaiah calls the desert of poverty a place of pleasure. O thorns of the world! O delights of the desert! The difference between you is as great as truth and error, light and darkness, glory and punishment. The former delight, the latter pains. In one is rest, in the other *vanity and affliction of spirit* [Eccles 1.14].

The Lord says of this in Proverbs: *My delights were to be with the children of men* [Prov 8.31], whom by nature he begot as poor. He says:

*Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked I shall return thither*; [Job 1.21]

but malice made the rich, because *they that will become rich fall into the snare of the devil* [1Tim 6.9]. So, *My delights are to be with the children of men*, not with the devil's children. O poverty! A hateful good to the devil’s children, your delights give the savour of eternal sweetness to those who love you!

There follows: *And her wilderness as the garden of the Lord*. Poverty loves solitude, for (as Isaiah says):

*Judgement shall dwell in the wilderness*. [Is 32.16]

And Jeremiah:

*From the presence of the hand of the Lord I sat alone,*

*because thou hast filled me with bitterness*. [cf. Jer 15.17]

Whoever wants to do judgement on himself must needs dwell in solitude, in lowliness of mind. As Ecclesiasticus says:

*Write wisdom in time of leisure*. [Cf. Ecclus 38.25]

Where there is judgement, there is wisdom; and where wisdom, there is the paradisal garden of the Lord. And because true poverty is always joyful, he adds: *Joy and gladness shall be found therein*. The Gloss says: "In Sion, which is likened to paradise, there should be only joy and gladness, confession and the voice of praise: so that what they will do in heaven with the angels, they meditate meanwhile on earth."

15. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause:

*Receive one another, as Christ also hath received you unto the honour of God*. [Rom 15.7]

Just as Christ received the blind to enlighten them, the lame to make them walk, the lepers to cleanse them, the deaf to restore their hearing, the dead to raise them again and the poor to preach the Gospel to them: so should we receive one another. If your neighbour is blind with pride, then as far as you can enlighten his eyes with the example of your humility. If he is lame with hypocrisy, straighten him by the work of truth. If he is leprous with lust, cleanse him by the word and example of chastity. If he is deaf with avarice, set before him the example of Gospel poverty. If he is dead from gluttony and drunkenness, raise him up by the example and virtue of abstinence. And preach the Gospel of Christ’s life to the poor.

Let us humbly implore him, then, beloved brothers, to cure us from those aforementioned ills of the soul, and be pleased to receive us to himself, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

**(On the third clause.**

**A moral and special sermon for enclosed and other religious: *What went you out to see*, and the rest that there follows.)**

16. There follows, thirdly:

*But what went you out into the desert to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold, they that are clothed in soft garments are in the house of kings*. [Mt 11.7-8]

Note. Let us see what the desert, the reed and the man clothed in soft garments signify morally.

The desert is the religious life. Whence there is **concordance** in Isaiah:

*The land that was desolate and impassable shall be glad:*

*and the wilderness shall rejoice and shall flourish like the lily.*

*It shall bud forth and blossom, and shall rejoice with joy and praise*. [Is 35.1-2]

In any religious Order, three things are to be observed completely: poverty, chastity and obedience. These three are referred to in this text; poverty, in the words: *The land that was desolate shall be glad*; chastity in: *It shall flourish like the lily*; and obedience in: *It shall bud forth*.

Let us say, then: *The land that was desolate shall be glad*. Note that any religious who wants true poverty must do three things. First he must renounce every outward possession; second, he must intend never to possess anything again; third, he must bear patiently the needs of his poverty. These three are expressed by 'desolate', 'impassable' and 'wilderness'.

The life of any religious must be 'desolate' in the renunciation of all outward possessions. It must be 'impassable', trackless, so that there remains in it no vestige of desire to have anything. Isaiah says of these two:

*The desert shall be as a Charmel: and Charmel shall be counted as a forest*. [Is 32.15]

Charmel is 'knowledge of circumcision', so the desert of religious life will be 'as a Charmel', a cutting off and renunciation of possession; and this cutting off of possessions will be a 'forest' as regards not having desire for possessions. Whoever is free from these two bonds may well rejoice and sing: *My soul is set free from the snares of the hunters* [Ps 123.7]. The trackless desert will rejoice!

To these two a third should be added: that a religious should *know how to hunger and thirst and suffer want* [cf. Phil 4.12]. In this way he will be a wilderness that will rejoice when he bears these and suchlike things patiently.

17. There follows, regarding chastity: *It shall flourish like the lily*. The milk-white lily

represents the brightness of chastity. In Lamentations, Jeremiah says:

*Her Nazarites were whiter than snow, purer than milk*. [Lam 4.7]

The Lord promises them in Isaiah:

*Let not the eunuch say: Behold I am a dry tree*. (that is, whoever has castrated himself for the kingdom of heaven by a promise of continence)

*For thus saith the Lord to the eunuchs: They that shall keep my sabbaths* (purity of heart, the sabbath of the breast),

*and shall choose the things that please me* (bodily continence, of which the Apostle says: *This is the will of God, your sanctification... that every one of you know how to possess his vessel- his body- in sanctification and honour* [1Thess 4.3-4]),

*and shall hold fast to my covenant* (which they made with me in Baptism),

*I will give to them in my house* (in which there are many mansions),

*and within my walls* (As the Apocalypse says: *And the building of the wall thereof was of jasper-stone*; green in colour, representing the joy of an ever-green eternity),

*a place* (of which it says in John: *I go to prepare a place for you* [Jn 14.2])

*and a name better than sons and daughters* (that is, more excellent than if they had begotten sons and daughters):

*an everlasting name* (of which the Apocalypse says: *I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city, new Jerusalem, and my new name* [Apoc 3.12]). He will have the name of God, because he will be like God, and will see him as he is (*I said: You are gods*); the name Jerusalem, peaceful; and the name Jesus, because he is saved. So, *I will give them an everlasting name*, which shall not perish, and will never fall into oblivion.

18. There follows, regarding obedience*: It shall bud forth and blossom, and shall rejoice with joy and praise*. Note that true obedience has five characteristics, expressed in the five words ‘bud forth’, ‘blossom’, ‘rejoice’, ‘joy’ and ‘praise’. True obedience is humble, devout, prompt, cheerful and persevering. Humble in heart is ‘budding forth’; the bud is the beginning of the flower and humility is the beginning of every good action. Being devout in speech is to ‘blossom’; from humility of heart devout speech proceeds. Promptness when ordered is **concordant** with ‘rejoice’; *He rejoices like a giant to run his course* [Ps 18.6]. Cheerfulness in tribulation is ‘joy’. Perseverance in fulfilling what is commanded is ‘praise’, because all praise is sung at the end.

O religious: such should be the desert of our religious life, to which you have gone out from worldly vanity to dwell in. So the Lord says to you: What went you out into the desert to see?

19. There follows: *A reed shaken with the wind?* A reed is swayed by every breeze, and dried up. Note that the root of the reed is in mud (meaning gluttony and lust), and it is hollow inside but beautiful outside (hypocrisy and vainglory). It is blown every way by the wind (representing instability of mind). Unhappy the cloister, cursed the desert of religious life, where such a tree is planted and grows: the axe is laid to the root of that tree, that it be cut down and cast into the fire! [cf. Mt 3.10; Lk 3.9]. The Lord says in Isaiah:

*I will set in the desert the fir-tree, the elm and the box-tree together*, [Is 41.19]

not a shaken reed! The fir-tree stands for heavenly conversation, the elm (which supports the vine) is compassion for one's neighbour, and the box-tree, pale in colour, is bodily mortification. It is with these trees, not with a wind-blown reed that will be burned in the fire, that the desert of blessing and the paradise of holy religion is sown and adorned.

There follows: *But what went you out to see? A man clothed in soft garments?* In this same Evangelist we read that:

*John had a garment of camel's hair and a leather girdle about his loins; and his food was locusts and wild honey*. [Mt 3.4]

I ask you: see if today's religious are dressed like that, or are used to such food. *Behold, they that are in soft garments are in the houses of kings*. I would say that it was an army of devils, not a religious Order, that makes the desert a palace, the cloister a castle, and the wilderness a royal court! Religious and soldiers make their clothes of the same cloth; but the tiller of the desert, the greatest of the prophets, had a garment of camel's hair. If blessed John, foretold by the angel and sanctified in the womb, praised by the Lord as the *greatest born of woman* [Lk 7.28]- if he was used to such harshness, what should we do, conceived in sin and burdened with sin, and to be rejected by the Lord unless he should have mercy on us? With what affliction and harshness should we afflict ourselves? In the desert of penitence let there be rough clothing and poor food, so that we may be truly called 'religious', men constrained from all carnal pleasure.

20. The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** with this third clause: *The God of hope*.

Isaiah says of this:

*They that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall take wings as eagles;*

*they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint*. [Is 40.31]

Those who hope, not in themselves, but in the Lord who is the God of hope, will renew their strength; so as to be strong in themselves, even though weak in the world. *This is the change of the right hand of the Most High* [Ps 76.11]. They shall take the two wings of love, with which to fly like eagles to heaven. According to the 'Physics', when an eagle's beak is too blunted by age, it renews it by rubbing it on a flint-stone. So too do those who mortify the 'old-age' of sin by *the Rock which is Christ* [1Cor 10.4]; being dead to the world they are made new to God. *Their youth is renewed like an eagle* [Ps 102.5]. 'They run', to gain the prize of eternal life; and 'they are not weary', because "nothing is hard for a lover". They 'walk' from virtue to virtue, and 'they do not faint, because they live for ever.

*May he fill you with all joy*; of which Isaiah says:

*Rejoice for joy with her* (i.e. Jerusalem), *all you that mourn for her;*

*that you may suck and be filled with the breasts of her consolations*. [Is 66.10-11]

*and peace*, of which Isaiah says:

I will make thy visitation peace [is 60.17]

*in believing*, of which Isaiah says:

*If you will not believe, you shall not continue*. [Is 7.9]

*that you may abound in hope, and in the power of the Holy Spirit*; whence Isaiah:

*Thou hast been a strength to the poor,*

*a strength to the needy in his distress,*

*a refuge from the whirlwind* (the devil's suggestions),

*a shadow from the heat* (the temptation of the flesh). [Is 25.4]

Any religious who is filled with these: that is, hope, joy and peace- hope as to poverty which hopes in God alone, joy as to chastity without which there is no joy of conscience, peace as to obedience, outside which no-one will enjoy peace (so that Isaiah says: *There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord* [Is 57.21])- if he is filled with these, he is sure to abound in hope and in the power of the Holy Spirit, so as to live confidently in the desert of the religious life.

Therefore, beloved brothers, let us ask the Lord Jesus to remove from us the shaking of the reed and the softness of garments, so that we may dwell in the desert of penitence as poor, chaste and obedient men. May he grant this, who is to be praised, who is kind and loveable, the blessed God for ever and ever. Let all clean and spotless religion say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

1. GREGORY, *In Evangelia, hom*. 6,1; PL 76.1095

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

**(A sermon for the third Sunday in Advent on the Epistle of blessed Paul: *Rejoice in the Lord*.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon for penitents: *In that day shall this canticle be sung*.)**

1. *Rejoice in the Lord always*. [Phil 4.4]

Isaiah says:

*In that day shall this canticle be sung in the land of Juda: Sion, the city of our strength:*

*a Saviour, a wall and a bulwark shall be set therein.*

*Open ye the gates: and let the just nation, that keepeth the truth, enter in*. [Is 26.12]

The 'day' is the illumination of grace, by which we are enlightened, and being enlightened we sing the song of which Isaiah says:

*You shall have a song as the voice of the sanctified solemnity,*

*and joy of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord,*

*to the Mighty One of Israel*. [Is 30.29]

The 'song' of confession is the 'voice of the sanctified solemnity', because it sanctifies the sinner, at whose conversion the angels keep festival. Thus, *There is joy before the angels of God*, etc. [Lk 15.10]. From this solemnity there arises joy in the sinner's heart, of which Isaiah says:

*Thou hast met him that rejoiceth and doth justice*, [Is 64.5]

'as one that goes with a pipe'. The 'pipe' is the melody of self-accusation, and when

anyone plays it perfectly he enters the mountain of the Lord, the heavenly Jerusalem, to see the Mighty One of Israel, Jesus Christ. And where is this song sung? In the ‘land of Juda’, of penitents, as Isaiah says:

*The land of Juda shall be a terror to Egypt*- [Is 19.17]

that is, to the world. Worldly folk are terrified when they see the just crucified on the cross of penance. So it says in Luke, of the Saviour’s Passion:

*When they saw the things that were done, they returned, striking their breasts*. [Lk 23.48]

Let us listen to what penitents sing in the joy of their hearts: *Sion, the city of our strength*. Sion means ‘a watch-tower’, and it stands for penitence, of which Jeremiah says:

*Set thee up a watch-tower: make to thee bitterness*. [Jer 31.21]

And in Isaiah, the penitent says:

*I am upon the watch-tower of the Lord, standing continually by day:*

*and I am upon my ward, standing whole nights*. [Is 21.8]

Prosperity lifts up, adversity casts down; and so the penitent says, *I am upon the watch-tower* of penitence, illuminated by the grace of the Lord; *standing*, that is, firm, through the day of prosperity, lest I fall from my intent; *and I am upon my ward, standing whole nights* of adversity, to keep myself from all sin. Penitents may well say that *Sion* (penitence) *is the city* (which guards and defends us in the day of prosperity) *of our strength* (which keeps us in the night of adversity lest we be overwhelmed).

There follows: *The Saviour will be set in it as a wall and a bulwark*. A wall is for defence; the wall represents the Divinity, and the bulwark humanity. The Saviour is ‘set in it as a wall’, as though to say that faith in the Incarnate Word is the protection and defence of penitents. So Isaiah says:

*As birds flying* (over their young), *so will the Lord of Hosts protect Jerusalem,*

*protecting and delivering, passing over and saving. [Is 31.5]*

*As the eagle enticing her young to fly, and hovering over them, [Dt 32.11]*

*as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings*, [Mt 23.37]

so Jesus, the Lord of the angelic hosts, protects Jerusalem, the congregation of

penitents. He 'protects' it, I say, with the overshadowing of his humanity; he 'delivers' it by the power of his divinity; he 'passes over' when he makes them pass through the Red Sea, the bitterness of penance made red by the blood of his Passion; he 'saves', when he brings them into the promised land, flowing with milk and honey. So he says to the angels: *Open the gates* (of paradise), *and let the righteous nation* (of penitents) *enter in, that keepeth the truth* (of the Gospel).

It is to this people, singing the song of a sanctified solemnity, with the music of the pipe, that the Apostle says in today's Epistle: *Rejoice in the Lord always*.

[ON THE EPISTLE]

**(Against prelates of the Church and on the unhappy trio of sins: *The whole head is sick*.)**

2. [*Rejoice in the Lord always*.] They cannot do this, those people of whom Isaiah says:

*The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is sad.*

*From the sole of the foot unto the top of the head, there is no soundness therein;*

*wounds and bruises and swelling sores are not bound up,*

*nor dressed nor fomented with oil*. [Is 1.5-6]

The 'head' stands for prelates, the 'heart' for true religious, the 'sole of the foot' for the laity. Alas! *The whole head is sick*. As Jeremiah says:

*From the prophets of Jerusalem corruption is gone forth into all the land*. [Jer 23.15]

And Daniel:

*Iniquity came out from Babylon,*

*from the ancient judges that seemed to govern the people*. [Dan 13.5]

Isaiah says of this sickness:

*On all their heads* (that is, the prelates of the Church) *shall be baldness,*

*and every beard shall be shaven*. [Is 15.2]

After a long illness, and in old age, the hair often falls out and the head becomes bald.

Alas! Our head (our prelates) has lost its hair (the grace of the Holy Spirit) from the long illness of vice; and their whole beard (all the vigour and strength of good works) is shaved off. So they have become weak and effeminate, as the Lord says of them by Isaiah:

*I will give children to be their princes, and the effeminate shall rule over them*. [Is 3.4]

In this way, *the whole head is sick*.

*And the whole heart is sad*. Note that there are three characteristics of the heart: it is the seat of wisdom, the law of nature is written upon it (namely, *What you would not have done to you*, etc. [cf. Tob 4.16]) and it is the organ of indignation. Likewise, in a true religious there is the wisdom of contemplation, the law of love, and indignation against sin. Such a heart, set between head and feet (clergy and laity) mourns and weeps for the weakness of both. *From the sole of the foot to the top of the head*, from least to greatest, from laity to clergy, from actives to contemplatives, *there is no soundness* in the body. How then can it rejoice in the Lord?

There follows: *Wounds and bruises*, etc. The 'wounds' are lust, the 'bruises' avarice, and the 'swelling sores' pride. Regarding the first two, Genesis records how Lamech said to his two wives:

*I have slain a man to the wounding of myself,*

*and a stripling to my own bruising*. [Gen 4.23]

Lamech was the first to bring the shame of bigamy into the world, and so he represents the lustful and avaricious man. He slays 'a man' (reason) by the wound of lust; and 'a stripling' (the beginning of good will) by the bruise of avarice. Avarice is not just a concern for material money, but any ambition, and from this desire the devouring bruise of dissension and detraction arises. Ambition for transient dignity is like a bone thrown to dogs, which enviously quarrel over it and snap at each other. They are, as Isaiah says:

*Most impudent dogs, they never had enough;*

*the shepherds themselves knew no understanding*. [Is 56.11]

Regarding the swelling of pride, it says in Job:

*Why doth thy heart elevate thee,*

*and why dost thou stare with thy eyes, as if they were thinking great things?*

*Why doth thy spirit swell against God, to utter such words out of thy mouth?* [Job 15.12-

13]

The Lord said something similar to Sennacherib in Isaiah:

*I know thy dwelling, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me.*

*When thou wast mad against me, thy pride came up to my ears*. [Is 37.28-29]

So we must say that the wound of lust is not bound up with the bandages of continence; the bruise of avarice is not healed by the medicine of almsgiving; and the swelling sore of pride is not soothed with the oil of inner humility, from which comes a clear conscience that generates joy in the Holy Spirit. Those who lack this cannot rejoice in the Lord; but those who return from iniquity to Jacob can rejoice in the Lord, those of whom Isaiah says:

*They shall return, and shall come into Sion with praise:*

*and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.*

*They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away*. [Is 35.10]

So, *rejoice in the Lord always*.

**(On the Incarnation of the Word: *Arise, arise*.)**

3. *And again I say, rejoice*. Note that he says ‘rejoice’ twice, because of the two-fold blessing of the first and second Advents. We should rejoice, because in his first coming he bestowed riches and glory on us. We should rejoice again, because in his second coming he will give us length of days. So it says in Proverbs:

*Length of days is in his right hand, and in his left hand riches and glory*. [Prov 3.16]

In his left hand (his first coming) were the glorious riches of poverty and humility, patience and obedience. In his right hand (the second coming) is eternal life.

Again, regarding the blessing of his first coming, Isaiah says:

*Arise, arise, put on strength, O thou arm of the Lord:*

*arise as in the days of old, in the ancient generations.*

*Hast thou not struck the proud one, and wounded the dragon?*

*Hast thou not dried up the sea, the water of the mighty deep?*

*Who madest the depths of the sea a way, that the delivered might pass over?* [Is 51.9-10]

The arm of the Lord is Jesus Christ the Son of God, in whom and by whom he made all things. This arm of God the Father was for our sake broken in two, when in his Passion his soul was separated from his flesh, and went down to free those who were in the world below, while his flesh rested in the tomb. But on the day of Resurrection the Father re-established his arm, and *healed the stroke of his wound* [Is 30.26]. So he says, *Arm of the Lord* (O my Son), *arise* from the throne of your Father's glory, *arise* and take on flesh, *put on strength* of divinity against the prince of this world, so that being stronger you may cast him out. *Arise* to redeem the human race, *as in the days of old* when you freed the people of Israel from the slavery of Egypt. O Son, you *struck the proud one*, the devil, expelling him from heaven; and you *wounded the dragon* in your Passion, when you took away his dominion. You *dried up the sea*', the Red Sea, as if to say: You who did these things will also do this. The Lord dried up the sea and the water of the roaring deep, when he destroyed the power of the devil ('the sea') and his lies ('the deep'), and so *made the depths of the sea* (hell) *a way that the delivered might pass over*.

Regarding the benefit of the second coming, the Lord says in Isaiah:

*Behold, I create* from angels and men, the heavenly *Jerusalem a rejoicing,*

*and the people thereof joy.*

*And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people;*

*and the voice of weeping shall no more be heard in her,*

*nor the voice of crying;* [Is 65.18-19]

because, as Isaiah also says:

*The Lord shall wipe away tears from every face*. [Is 25.8]

4. There follows: *Let your moderation be known unto all men*. Moderation is keeping the middle way in everything. Moderation consists chiefly in two things: peace of mind and decency in body. Isaiah says of it:

*The work of justice shall be peace;*

*and the service of justice, quietness and security for ever*. [Is 32.17]

The work of justice- that is, of those who are justified by grace- is peace. They lay the

foundation of every good work in peace of mind; and so the ‘service’ (outward works and demeanour) is quietness. When the inner man rests in the house of peace, the outer man sits in decency and the security of quietness. To a man so still and self-contained, there will be security for ever.

*The Lord is at hand*. This is what the Father says in Isaiah:

*I have brought my justice* (i.e. my Son) *near:*

*it shall not be afar off, and my salvation shall not tarry.*

*I will give salvation in Sion and my glory in Jerusalem*. [Is 46.12]

This is what is said in today’s Gospel:

*There hath stood one in the midst of you whom you know not:* [Jn 1.26]

*the mediator of God and man, the man Christ Jesus* [1Tim 2.5], who takes the field against the devil, whom he will conquer, and rescue man from his hand, and reconcile him to God the Father. This is what he says in Isaiah:

*I have nourished children and exalted them: but they have despised me.*

*The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib,*

*but Israel hath not known me, and my people hath not understood*. [Is 1.2-3]

See how near the Lord is, and we do not know him! *I have nourished my children* like a mother, with my blood for milk. *I have exalted* human nature, which I took from them and united it to myself above the choirs of angels. He could not bestow upon us any greater honour or privilege. *And they despised me*.

*Attend and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow* [Lam 1.12].

*Woe to thou that spurnest! Shalt not thou thyself also be spurned?* [Is 33.1]

So in Proverbs we read:

*The eye that mocketh at his father,*

*and that despiseth the labour of his mother in bearing him:*

*let the ravens of the brooks pick it out, and the young eagles eat it*. [Prov 30.17]

A literal interpretation is enough to show the punishment for despising father or mother. The ox (the thief on the cross) knows his owner, saying: *Remember me* [Lk 23.42]; the ass (the centurion) his master's crib, saying: *Truly this was the Son of God* [Mk 15.40]; *but Israel* (the clergy) *has not known me, and my people* (the laity) *has not understood*.

**(For the body of a dead person: *Behold, at my rebuke*; and: *The fishers also shall mourn*.)**

5. There follows: *Be nothing solicitous*. Solicitude for temporal things leads to forgetfulness of God. So he says in Isaiah:

*Thou hast found the life of thy hand: therefore thou hast not asked.*

*For that* (that is, for keeping riches) *hast thou been solicitous and afraid,*

*so that thou hast lied and hast not been mindful of me*. [Is 57.10-11]

And again:

*Thou hast said: I shall be a lady for ever.*

*Thou hast not laid these things to thy heart, neither hast thou remembered thy latter end.*

*And now hear these things, thou that art delicate and dwellest confidently,*

*that sayest in thy heart: I am, and there is none else besides me;*

*I shall not sit as a widow, and I shall not know barrenness.*

*These two things shall come upon thee suddenly in one day:*

*barrenness and widowhood*. [Is 47.7-9]

In one day these two things shall come upon the *daughter of the Chaldeans* to whom this curse is addressed, the wretched soul given to the concupiscence of the senses: barrenness in temporal abundance, and widowhood of carnal concupiscence.

So the Lord curses in Isaiah:

*Behold, at my rebuke I will make the sea a desert, I will turn the rivers into dry land:*

*the fishes shall rot for want of water, and shall die for thirst*. [Is 50.2]

The separation of the soul from the body is like the Lord's rebuke in Genesis:

*In the sweat of they face shalt thou eat bread,*

*till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken*. [Gen 3.19]

In the ‘rebuke’ of death, the Lord makes ‘the sea’, the bitterness and depth of temporal abundance, ‘a desert’. So Isaiah says:

*The daughter of Sion shall be left as a covert in a vineyard,*

*as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, and as a city that is laid waste*. [Is 1.8]

Just as the covert is abandoned when the grapes are all picked, and the lodge is abandoned when the fruits are gathered, and a city is deserted and laid waste when its people are led into captivity: so the daughter of Sion, the soul abandoned by God and given over to the devil, will be stripped of all her riches and pleasures. So it goes on: *I will turn the rivers*, the pleasures of the five senses, *into dry land*. Then ‘the fish’, the fussy and solicitous folk whose paths are in the sea of this world, will ‘rot’ in their own excrement, ‘for want of water’, the abundance and concupiscence that they used to swim in, and *they shall die of thirst*, the thirst that tormented the purple-clad rich man in hell [cf. Lk 16.24].

So, *be nothing solicitous*, because Isaiah says of fussy and solicitous folk:

*The fishers also shall mourn, and all that cast a hook into the river shall lament:*

*and they that spread nets upon the waters shall languish away.*

*They shall be confounded, that wrought in flax, combing and weaving fine linen*. [Is 19.8-9]

The ‘fishers’ are those who love this world, fretting and worrying about riches and pleasures. Those who ‘cast a hook into the river’ are false merchants who, as it were, cover the hook of their intention with the bait of deceitful attraction, so as to catch those who want to buy. Those who ‘spread nets upon the waters’ are accursed usurers, who catch great and small, rich and poor, in the net of their usury. Those who ‘work in flax, combing and weaving fine linen’ are lawyers, legal experts and false advocates with their quibbles. All these folk will lament at their life’s end, when they must give up their stewardship [cf. Lk 16.2], because they will be miserably stripped of the riches they so carefully amassed and so ardently loved. They will languish away, because when their

souls have departed their bodies they will be given to demons to be eternally punished. They will be confounded in the day of judgement before God and his angels. So, *be nothing solicitous*.

6. There follows:

*But in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God*.

So were made known the petitions of Ezechias, of whom there is a **concordance** in Isaiah:

*Ezechias turned his face to the wall* (sc. of the temple, for he could not go to the temple, being too ill) *and prayed to the Lord; and said: I beseech thee, O Lord, remember how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Ezechias wept with great weeping*. [Is 38.2-3]

The Gloss says, "He wept because he was going to die without sons, and he was afraid that the promise made to his fathers would fail because of his sins."

*And the word of the Lord came to Isaias, saying: Go and say to Ezechias: Thus saith the Lord the God of David thy father: I have heard thy prayer, and I have seen thy tears; behold, I will add to thy days fifteen years. And I will deliver thee and thy city out of the hand of the king of the Assyrians, and I will protect it*. [Is 38.4-7]

The ‘wall’, which stands vertically, is the humanity of Jesus Christ, whose life was entirely upright. In the Canticles, the Bride says of this wall:

*Behold, he standeth behind our wall*. [Cant 2.9]

And Isaiah:

*The blast of the mighty is like a whirlwind beating against a wall*. [Is 25.4]

The Jews raged against Jesus but could not overthrow him, steadfast in his Passion. Turn yourself to this wall, then, O sinner, because your soul is restrained by weakness. Turn yourself by heartfelt contrition and true confession, which you should make with many tears and with the intention of persevering to the end. In this way, penitent, you will make your petitions known to God. He will add to the days of your penance years of glory; he will deliver you from the hand of the king of the Assyrians, the devil and his ministers; and he will protect and defend the city, your soul and body.

So there follows: *And the peace of God*- (of which Isaiah says: *Let peace come: let him rest in his bed that hath walked in his righteousness* [Is 57.2]. According to the Gloss,

"The prophet prayed for Christ to come, and when he rose from the dead he ‘rested in his bed’, the glory of his Father’s majesty; or in the Church, in which he walked in righteousness because he did no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.")

*which surpasseth understanding* (whether of angels or of men; the Apostle says: *Who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?* [Rom 11.24])

*keep your hearts*, (that peace may be the work of justice)

*and minds,* (that the service of justice may be quietness)

*in Christ Jesus our Lord*.

Let us humbly beseech him then, beloved brothers, to enable us to sing the song of a sanctified solemnity; and so to rejoice in him, live modestly, put away solicitude, and make known to him our every petition, that protected by his peace we may live in the peaceful heavenly Jerusalem. May he grant this, who is blessed and glorious for ever and ever. Let every peace-loving soul say: Amen. Alleluia.

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

**(The Gospel for the fourth Sunday in Advent: *The word of the Lord came to John*, which is divided into two clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon for preachers or prelates of the Church: *Get thee upon a high mountain*.)**

1. At that time: *The word of the Lord came to John, the son of Zachary, in the desert*. [Lk 3.2]

Isaiah says:

*Get thee up upon a high mountain,*

*thou that bringest good tidings to Sion.*

*Lift up thy voice with strength,*

*thou that bringest good tidings to Jerusalem*. [Is 40.9]

Let us see what these three mean, ‘mountain’, ‘Sion’, ‘Jerusalem’.

A mountain, being immovable, stands for the stable life of the just man; of whom Isaiah says:

*A man shall be as when one is hid from the wind,*

*and hideth himself from a storm:*

*as rivers of water in drought,*

*and the shadow of a rock that standeth out in a desert land*. [Is 32.2]

This is as if to say: thus will the just man be safe in tribulation, as one who hides himself in a safe place to escape wind and storm; or as one who finds clear springs in the desert; or who wards off the heat of the sun under the shade of a rock. The just man hides from the wind of the devil's suggestions, and from the storm of worldly prosperity. He is watered by the rivers of grace in the drought of carnal desire, and he wards off the heat of the sun (worldly persecution) under the shade of the rock which protects him in tribulation, Jesus Christ. In this way, the life of the just is a 'mountain'.

On the other hand, Isaiah says of king Ahaz:

*His heart was moved, and the heart of his people,*

*as the trees of the wood are moved by the wind*. [Is 7.2]

And Job:

*A mountain falling cometh to nought:*

*and a rock is removed out of its place.*

*Waters wear away the stones:*

*and with inundation the ground little by little is washed away*. [Job 14.18-19]

(see above, in the story of Job [Pentecost XIV, clause 3]).

So, *get you up upon the high mountain* which does not fall and come to nought, you who bring good tidings to Sion. St Gregory says, "He who is engaged in heavenly preaching seems already to have deserted the depths of earthly works, and to be standing on the very heights. He will more easily draw those entrusted to him to better things, the more his good life proclaims heavenly things. That voice more readily penetrates the hearer's heart, when the speaker's life commends it. The spoken precept is reinforced by his example, to bring it about."

There follows: *Lift up thy voice with strength, thou that bringest good tidings to Jerusalem*. Sion was the lower part of the city, representing secular folk; Jerusalem was the higher part, meaning religious. When you bring good tidings to Sion, you must go up upon a high mountain, so that it may follow you up from the lower to the higher. So it says in the second book of Kings:

*But David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, going up and weeping, walking barefoot, and with his head covered: and all the people that were with him went up with their heads covered, weeping*. [2Kg(Sm) 15.30]

David is the preacher who, as he goes up by the ascent of mount Olivet (excellence of life, which enlightens and anoints with the oil of divine mercy), should do three things: weep, cover his head, and walk barefoot. He should weep like Axa for 'the upper and nether watery ground' [cf. Jos 15.19; Jg 1.15]; he should cover his head (which contains all the senses); and he should walk with feet bare of worldly vanity, with the affections of his mind stripped of the dead hide of self-will and possessiveness. If he goes up like that, all the people will go up devoutly after him, with heads covered from worldly vanity and weeping for their sins. But it does not say that the people walked barefoot, because it is lawful for seculars to own personal property.

When you bring good tidings to Jerusalem, that is, to religious, you must lift up your voice with strength, that they may be strongly inspired and may *rejoice to run the way'*[Ps 18.6], *to receive an incorruptible crown* [1Cor 9.25]. Job says of the horse (meaning the just man):

*When he heareth the trumpet* (of preaching, sounding strongly),

*he saith: Ha, ha!* [Job 39.25]

*He pranceth boldly; he goeth forward to meet armed men.*

*He despiseth fear; he turneth not his back to the sword*. [Job 39.21-22]

John the Baptist, greatest of preachers, went up upon a high mountain and lifted up his voice with strength. It is of him and his preaching that today's Gospel says: *The word of the Lord came*.

2. There are two things to note in this Gospel: the high ground of preaching and the valley of humility. The first is: *The word of the Lord came*; the second is: *Every valley*.

In the Introit of the Mass we sing: Be mindful of us, Lord; and the Epistle of blessed Paul to the Corinthians is read: Let a man so account of us; which we will divide into two parts and **concord** with the two clauses of the Gospel. The first part is: *Let a man so*; the second is: *Therefore judge not before the time*.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(On: *Go, ye swift angels*; in which text seven vices are described.)**

3. Let us say, then: *The word of the Lord came to John, the son of Zachary, in the desert*.

John represents the prelate or preacher of holy Church, who should be a 'son of Zachary' ('remembrance of the Lord') so as always to have in mind, like a kind of memorial, the Passion of Jesus Christ. So Isaiah says:

*Thy name and thy remembrance are the desire of the soul.*

*My soul hath desired thee in the night:*

*yea, and with my spirit within me in the morning early I will watch to thee*. [Is 26.8-9]

In the night of adversity we should desire him, and in the morning of prosperity we should watch to him, and keep his Passion in mind as a remembrance. So it says in Exodus:

*It shall be as a sign in thy hand, and as a memorial before thy eyes*. [Ex 13.9]

And in Deuteronomy, referring to the Incarnation and Passion of the Lord:

*These words shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt tell them to thy children,*

*and thou shalt meditate upon them sitting in thy house,*

*and walking on thy journey, sleeping and rising.*

*And thou shalt bind them as a sign on thy hand:*

*and they shall be and shall move between thy eyes.*

*And thou shalt write them in the entry, and on the doors of thy house*. [Dt 6.6-9]

If the prelate or preacher be a 'son of Zachary', saying with the Psalmist: *I remembered God and was delighted* [Ps 76.4], (that is, in the bitterness of his Passion, so as to say with the Bride in Canticles:

*A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me:*

*he shall abide between my breasts*, [Cant 1.12])

then the word of the Lord will come to him, the word of life and peace, the word of grace and truth, the word which Isaiah the son of Amos saw concerning Juda and Jerusalem [cf. Is 1.1]- that is, concerning the soul which confesses and dwells at peace with itself. O word that does not wound, but inebriates the heart! O sweet word, that brings the sinner comfort and blessed hope! O word, *like cold water to a thirsty soul, bearing good tidings from a far country* [cf. Prov 25.25]. This is *the whisper of a gentle breeze* [3(1)Kg 19.12], the inspiration of Almighty God, of which it is said:

*As I see, there is a spirit in men,*

*and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding*. [Job 32.8]

O how truly blessed and truly worthy of being called ‘John’, to whom there came this word! May this word, I pray, Lord, come to *your servant, according to your word, in peace* [cf. Lk 2.29]. *Your word is a lamp to my paths* [Ps 118.105].

We have heard to whom it came; but in what place did it come? *In the desert*. Where there is the desert, there is the word: that desert, I say, of which the Psalm says:

*In a desert land, and where there is no way and no water; so in the sanctuary*, etc. [Ps 62.3]

(See above, in the Gospel: When the unclean spirit goes out [Lent III, clause 4].

4. There follows: *And he came to all the country about the Jordan*.

When the word of divine inspiration comes to someone, he undoubtedly comes into ‘the country of the Jordan’, (which means ‘humble descent’), representing compassion towards one’s neighbour. The prelate or preacher should stoop and come down, so as to lift up his neighbour who lies prostrate.

There is a **concordance** to this in Isaiah, where the Lord says to preachers:

*Go, ye swift angels, to a nation rent and torn in pieces:*

*to a terrible people, after which there is no other:*

*to a nation expecting and trodden under foot,*

*whose land the rivers have spoiled*. [Is 18.2]

In this text seven vices are referred to, by which the human race is stricken. O angels, you prelates and preachers, go swiftly, for delay brings danger. Therefore the Lord said to his Apostles: *Salute no man by the way* [Lk 10.4], lest the course of your preaching be hindered. And in the fourth book of Kings, Eliseus tells Giezi:

*If any man meet thee, salute him not:*

*and if any man salute thee, answer him not*. [4(2)Kg 4.29]

Go, then, swiftly *to a nation* that lives at ease, *rent* from the root of humility by the spirit

of pride. Job says:

*He hath taken away my hope, as from a tree that is plucked up*. [Job 19.10]

*torn in pieces* by envy which tears the heart; as Nahum says:

*Woe to thee, O city of blood, all full of lies and violence*. [Nah 3.1]

*to a terrible people*, by wrath, of which Job says:

*My enemy hath beheld me with terrible eyes*. [Job 16.10]

*to a nation expecting* the reward of vainglory; he says:

*They have received their reward*. [Mt 6.5]

and:

*Thou didst sit in the ways, waiting for them as a robber in the wilderness* [Jer 3.2]

*and trodden under foot* by avarice; as Isaiah says:

*I will give him to tread them down like the mire in the streets;* [Is 10.6]

and Habbakuk:

*Woe to him that heapeth together that which is not his own;*

*how long also doth he load himself with thick clay?* [Hab 2.6]

*whose land* (mind) *the rivers* (of gluttony and lust) *have spoiled*; of which Ezekiel says:

*Behold, I come against thee, thou great dragon that liest in the midst of thy rivers,*

*and sayest: The river is mine*. [Ezek 29.3]

How necessary preaching is, we learn from this text which follows in the Gospel:

*Preaching the baptism of penance for the remission of sins*. [Lk 3.3]

As Isaiah says:

*Wash yourselves: be clean*, [Is 1.16]

and a little further on:

*If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow:*

*and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool*. [Is 1.18]

(See above in the Gospel: *Jesus took Peter and James and John* [Lent IIA].

The Lord also says in Isaiah:

*I have blotted out thy iniquities as a cloud, and thy sins as a mist;*

*return to me* (by penitence) *for I have redeemed thee* (by my blood). [Is 44.22]

and:

*Be comforted, be comforted, my people, saith your God.*

*Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem, and call to her:*

*for her evil is come to an end, her iniquity is forgiven.*

*She hath received of the hand of the Lord double for all her sins*. [Is 40.1-2]

The Gloss comments: "The cause of comfort is the remission of sins; the cause of remission is that she has received double. Note that our sins are not loosed unless we receive it from the hand of the Lord. Nor is loosing from sin the same as forgiveness: he who is forgiven does not need loosing. He says: *Your sins are forgiven*; when they are loosed, it is because they are purged and loosed by penance."

**(On the life of the preacher or prelate, and on the Passion of Jesus Christ: *A voice crying in the wilderness*.)**

5. There follows: *As it was written in the book of the sayings of Isaias the prophet: A voice of one crying in the wilderness*. [Lk 3.4]

Note these three: ‘voice’, ‘crying’ and ‘wilderness’. What is a voice? Who is crying? What is the wilderness? The voice is the preacher, Christ is the one who cries, the wilderness is his Cross.

A voice is air, and the preacher should be ‘airy’, that is, heavenly, with his conversation

in heaven. So it says in Exodus:

*Under (the Lord's) feet as it were a work of sapphire stone,*

*as the heaven when clear*. [Ex 24.10]

Sapphire has the colour of air; the work of sapphire stone is the life of the holy preacher, who in humility of mind is under the 'feet' of the Lord's Incarnation, and hangs in the air by contemplation of heavenly blessedness. Whence Isaiah says:

*Who are these that fly like clouds, and as doves to their windows?* [Is 60.8]

The holy preachers are called 'clouds' because of their lightness, unburdened by earthly cares. They rain down by their words, they thunder with threats, they shine out by their examples, and fly in heaven by the wings of virtue. Like simple doves they stand at the windows, guarding the five senses of their body, lest death enter into the house of the mind. O Lord, were I to hear such a voice, I would cry out with Adam: *I heard thy voice, and I was afraid* [Gen 3.10]. Such a voice is not human, but as of the high God. Therefore,

*Let thy voice sound in my ears; for thy voice is sweet*. [Cant 2.14]

*My lips trembled at the voice* [Hab 3.16]- such a voice!

*The voice of thy thunder in a wheel*. [Ps 76.19]

But alas! I do not hear a voice, only a bellowing and muttering! Isaiah says:

*Thou shalt speak out of the earth; and thy speech shall be heard out of the ground;*

*and thy voice shall be from the earth like that of the python,*

*and out of the ground thy speech shall mutter*. [Is 29.4]

(see above, on the Gospel: *A certain man made a great supper* [Pentecost II].) This muttering is not that of the Christ who cries out, for he speaks to us of heavenly things, not of earthly. As Isaiah says, *He cries out like a lion* [Is 21.8].

Where, though? *In the desert*. The 'desert' was his Cross, whereon he was deserted, naked and crowned with thorns. There he cried out. So the prophet Amos says:

*Moab shall die with a noise, with the sound of a trumpet*. [Am 2.2]

Moab is the devil, who died at the sound of the trumpet of the Lord's preaching; and at the sound of him crying out on the Cross: *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit* [Lk 23.46; cf. Ps 30.6]. And Isaiah again:

*Behold, the sovereign Lord of Hosts shall break the earthen vessel with terror.*

*And the tall of stature shall be cut down: and the lofty shall be humbled.*

*And the thickets of the forest shall be cut down with iron:*

*and Libanus with its high ones shall fall*. [Is 10.33-34]

The earthen vessel is the humanity of Christ, taken from the virgin earth, which he broke in his Passion. This was to the terror of the demons, the 'tall of stature' who were cut down from their power. The 'lofty' (the proud Jews) were humbled and cast down in retribution for the Passion of Christ; the 'thickets of the forest' (the earthly Jerusalem, so-called from the multitude of its people) were cut down by the iron of Titus and Vespasian; and 'Libanus' (the temple) fell with its high ones (the priests).

**(At the beginning of the fast, for penitents: *At the first time was lightly touched*.)**

6. There follows: *Prepare ye the way of the Lord*. [Lk 3.4]

Isaiah says:

*At the first time, the land of Zabulon and the land of Nephtali was lightly touched:*

*and at the last the way of the sea... was heavily loaded*. [Is 9.1]

This is the three days of which Moses says in Exodus: *We will go a three days' journey into the wilderness, to sacrifice unto the Lord our God* [Ex 3.18]. *At the first time* (the infusion of grace which goes first before the sinner) *the earth* (his mind) *is lightly touched* (in contrition for the burden of sin). Then it is 'the land of Zabulon' ('dwelling of strength'). He in whom grace dwells is supported by the strength of constancy. Whence Isaiah says:

*It is he that giveth strength to the weary,*

*and increaseth force and might to them that are not*. [Is 40.29]

He is 'lightened' also in confession, when he lays down sin and its circumstances. Then he is 'the land of Nephtali' ('widening'). The sinner's mind is widened in confession, as the Lord said to Jacob in Genesis:

*Thou shalt spread abroad to the east and to the west,*

*and to the north and to the south*. [Gen 28.14]

Note that the priest in confession should set four things before the sinner: whether he grieves and sorrows for the things he has done or left undone; whether he will humbly fulfil the penance enjoined upon him by the priest; whether he has a firm intention to sin mortally no more; and whether he will satisfy his neighbour, forgive him from his heart, and love him. If he is willing to do these four things, then he should enjoin a penance on him and absolve him; otherwise, not. When he grieves and sorrows, he 'spreads to the east', being enlightened by the sun of justice. When he is willing to obey the will and voice of the priest, he 'spreads to the west': he 'sets' as regards himself, when he subjects himself to another. When he has the firm intention not to fall again, he 'spreads to the north', by which the devil's temptation is understood. He 'turns north' when he resists the devil's assault. "An enemy who fights well, makes you fight well." When he wants to love his neighbour, he 'spreads to the south', whereby we understand the warmth of charity.

If in this way he goes two days' journey, he will be able to reach the third, of which it was said: *At the last the way of the sea was heavily loaded* (that is, gravely afflicted). The 'way of the sea' is the satisfaction of penance, which is truly bitter. So Isaiah says:

*The drink shall be bitter to them that drink it*. [Is 24.9]

In the first two, the soul is lightened; in the third, the flesh is gravely afflicted indeed. So St Gregory says, "It was needful that the flesh, which light heartedly led the way to guilt, should with affliction lead back to pardon." This is the way by which the Lord comes to the soul. Blessed is he who thus prepares; he says: *My heart is ready, O God*, etc. [Ps 56.8].

**(For religious, priests and prelates: *The paths of justice*; and: *You shall be called priests of the Lord*; and: *In that day I will call*.)**

7. There follows: *Make straight the paths of our God* [Lk 3.4]. Isaiah says:

*The way of the just is right; the path of the just is right to walk in*. [Is 26.7]

A 'way' is the means by which we go. The 'way' is any religious order which restricts and restrains itself by vows of poverty, continence and obedience. So Isaiah says:

*The bed is straitened so that one must fall out:*

*and a short covering cannot cover both.* [Is 28.20]

The ‘bed’ is religious life, which when narrowed down like a path will have room only for the bridegroom of chastity and the spirit of obedience, and will push out the adulterer of fornication and the vice of disobedience. Further, the ‘short covering’ of poverty cannot cover both the spirit of ownership and of poverty. *What concord hath Christ and Belial?* [2Cor 6.15]. What is there in common between the poor man and the possessive man, who is like Belial among the sons of God? *Make straight*, then, you religious, *the paths* of our God.

8. The first part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this first clause:

*Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the ministries of God*. [1Cor 4.1]

Isaiah says:

*You shall be called the priests of the Lord, ministers of our God*. [Is 61.6]

Prelates and preachers are ministers and dispensers, who minister the word of the Lord, and preach the baptism of penitence for the remission of sins. Isaiah says:

*How beautiful* (being clean from the dust of sin)

*upon the mountains* (of virtue)

*are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings,*

*and that preacheth peace* (the reconciliation of God and man),

*of him that sheweth forth good* (the infusion of grace)

*that preacheth salvation* (blessedness of life),

*that saith to Sion* (the soul):

*Thy God shall reign* (in thee, rather that sin)! [Is 52.7]

*Here now it is required among the dispensers, that a man be found faithful*. [1Cor 4.2]

The Lord says of the faithful dispenser:

*In that day I will call my servant Eliacim, the son of Helcias,*

*and I will clothe him with thy robe,*

*and will strengthen him with thy girdle,*

*and will give thy power into his hand:*

*and he shall be as a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem,*

*and to the house of Juda*. [Is 22.20-21]

Eliacim means ‘resurrection of God’, and represents the faithful dispenser of the Church, by whom God raises the sinner to penitence. He is ‘son of Helcias’ (‘justice’), clad in the robe of mercy and strengthened with the girdle of continence, and is like a father to all the faithful of the Church. Where can such a faithful dispenser be found today? Alas, as Isaiah says:

*How is the* (once) *faithful city, that was full of judgement, become a harlot?*

*Justice dwelt in it, but now murderers.*

*Thy silver is turned into dross: thy wine is mingled with water.*

*Thy princes are faithless, companions of thieves:*

*they all love bribes, they run after rewards.*

*They judge not for the fatherless, and the widow’s cause cometh not into them*. [Is 1.21-23]

The ‘silver’ (the eloquence of prelates and preachers) is turned into the ‘dross’ of vainglory. The ‘wine’ of preaching is mixed with the ‘water’ of flattery and of temporal reward. The rest needs no interpretation: it speaks for itself.

Let us ask the Lord Jesus Christ, beloved brothers, to send us the word of his inspiration, and to wash us in the baptism of penitence: that we may prepare his way and make straight his paths. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

**(On the second clause.**

**The theme for a sermon on humility: *Every valley shall be filled*.)**

9. There follows, secondly: *Every valley shall be filled*. [Lk 3.5]

This is what the Lord says in Isaiah:

*To whom shall I have respect,*

*but to him that is poor and little and of a contrite spirit,*

*and that trembleth at my words?* [Is 66.2]

The valley is humility of mind, of which Jeremiah says:

*See thy ways in the valley;* [Jer 2.23]

that is, know your sins in two-fold humility. Humility shows a man to himself; whence Isaiah says:

*The Lord shall be known by Egypt:*

*and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day.* [Is 19.21]

In the clear daylight of humility, the Egyptians (proud dwellers in darkness) know the Lord, and so, conversely, know themselves. So St Augustine says, "Lord, grant me to know you and myself!" And Isaiah, after he had seen the Lord, said to himself:

*Woe is me, because I have held my peace;*

*because I am a man of unclean lips*. [Is 6.5]

And the Lord said to Ezekiel:

*Son of man, shew to the house of Israel the temple* (Jesus Christ),

*and let them be ashamed of their iniquities*. [Ezek 43.10]

So every valley shall be filled with that grain of wheat which falls into the earth and dies [cf. Jn 12.24], and of which the Psalm says:

*The vales shall abound with corn*. [Ps 64.14]

Blessed Mary, being a ‘valley’, was filled; and of her fulness all we empty ones have received [cf. Jn 1.16]. So the Psalm says:

*We shall be filled with the richness of thy house*. [Ps 35.9; 64.5]

Only the humble shall be filled with that richness which the Lord promises in Leviticus:

*I will give you rain in due seasons,*

*and the ground shall bring forth its increase,*

*and the trees shall be filled with fruit*. [Lev 26.3-4]

The Lord ‘gives rain’ when he infuses the grace of compunction. So Isaiah says:

*Rain shall be given to thy seed, wheresoever thou shalt sow in the land*, [Is 30.23]

which brings forth its increase. From the rain of compunction there springs up the crop of good will, and so the ‘trees’ (the bodily senses) are filled with the fruit of good works.

**(On the three-fold state of good people: *Eat this year*.)**

10. There is a **concordance** to this in Isaiah, where he says to Ezechias:

*Eat this year the things that spring of themselves, and in the second year eat fruits;*

*but in the third year sow and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them*. [Is 37.30]

Note that the condition of the good is three-fold, represented by these three years, namely beginners, proficients and perfect. Beginners, with free and prevenient grace, eat what springs of itself. This is what the Lord says in Hosea: *I will love them freely* [Hos 14.5]. With no previous merits, they are refreshed by grace by God's kindness alone. So St Bernard says, "Sometimes the affection of pure prayer, and the good sweetness of affection, is not found; but, as it were, it finds him. When he is not seeking, nor asking, nor knocking, and as it were knows not, grace comes beforehand. As a people of slaves is received at the children's table, the mind all untaught and just beginning is taken up into that affection of prayer which is usually given as the reward of holiness to the merits of the perfect." Again, the proficient, as if in the second year, eat the fruits of good works, so that the good will which was first in the affection, is now in effective action. The perfect are those who, as it were in the third year, abound in every way with a plentiful crop. So the Psalm says:

*Thou shalt bless the crown of the year* (the perfect life of the just) *of thy goodness:*

*and thy fields shall be filled with plenty*. [Ps 64.12]

This filling is the visitation spoken of in the Introit of today’s Mass:

*Remember us, O Lord, in the favour of thy people*. [Ps 105.4]

This is what Isaiah speaks of:

*Look down from heaven and behold;*

*from thy holy habitation and the place of thy glory*. [Is 63.15]

And again:

*Be not very angry, O Lord, and remember no longer our iniquity:*

*behold, see, we are all thy people. [Is 64.9]*

*Visit us with thy salvation,* [Ps 104.4]

that is, in your Son; that *the valleys may be filled with corn*.

**(On the punishment of the proud: *Thy pride is brought down to hell*.)**

11. There follows: *And every mountain and hill shall be brought low*. [Lk 3.5]

This is what Isaiah says:

*Thy pride is brought down to hell: thy carcass is fallen down.*

*Under thee shall the moth be strewed, and worms shall be thy covering*. [Is 14.11]

Note these two things: the mountain and the hill. The ‘mountain’ is pride in the heart, the ‘hill’ is pride in action. The former is greater than the latter. So Isaiah says:

*We have heard of the pride of Moab, he is exceeding proud.*

*His pride and his arrogancy and his indignation is more than his strength*. [Is 16.6]

The Interlinear Gloss explains, "His ambition is greater than his power."

*Therefore shall Moab howl to Moab: every one shall howl*. [ibid]

That is, in hell the proud shall howl to the proud, and the lustful to the lustful, and they shall all cry out against each other. So Isaiah says:

*The hairy ones shall cry out to one another*. [Is 34.14]

And:

*He shall bring down them that dwell on high:*

*the high city he shall lay low.*

*He shall bring it down even to the ground:*

*he shall pull it down even to the dust*. [Is 26.5]

So he says again:

*The crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under the feet*- [Is 28.3] of demons, that is. And again:

*Sit thou silent and get thee into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans:*

*for thou shalt no more be called the lady of kingdoms*. [Is 47.5]

Thus, *Every mountain and hill shall be brought low*.

**(On the Incarnation of the Word, and its purpose: *O that thou wouldst rend the heavens*.)**

12. This may be explained, alternatively, in reference to the virtue of humility. Isaiah, desiring the Advent of Christ and foreseeing his humility, says:

*O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and wouldst come down.*

*the mountains would melt away at thy presence.*

*They would melt as at the burning of fire,*

*the waters would burn with fire*. [Is 64.1-2[

See with what great desire he burns, wanting the heavens to be rent, so that he might see the invisible visible in the flesh! Let the heavens be rent, let the Word come down, from whose face the pride of the mountains will melt away. ‘From your face’, the presence of your humanity, the mountains would melt away. Who can be so proud, arrogant and puffed up, if he attends closely to majesty emptied, power made weak and wisdom crying like a child? Is it not his heart that melts, *like wax in the face of fire*? [Ps 67.3] And who will say with the prophet, *In thy truth* (in thy humbled Son, O Father) *thou*

*hast humbled me?*

And *as at the burning of a fire*, like wood, straw or stubble, the avaricious will melt. Who is so miserly, if he well considers the Son of God, wrapped in swathing bands, lying in a manger, having no-where to lay his head, save where he *bowed his head and gave up his spirit*? [Jn 19.30] Will he not melt away from love of earthly things, and all his wealth will be turned to ashes as by a burning fire? And will not the 'waters' (the lustful, who daily by their faults tend towards hell) burn with the fire of the Holy Spirit, who dries up the moisture of lust and confers the grace of continence?

13. There follows: *And the crooked shall be made straight*. [Lk 3.5]

This is what Isaiah says;

*Let the wicked forsake his* (crooked) *way, and the unjust man his thoughts,*

*and let him return to the Lord; and he will have mercy on him*. [Is 55.7]

Jeremiah says:

*The heart of man is perverse and unsearchable. Who can know it?* [Jer 17.9]

Isaiah says of this perversity:

*He went away wandering in his own heart*, [Is 57.17]

a fugitive like Cain, to whom it was said: *A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be upon the earth* [Gen 4.12], in the path of his own crooked action. The crooked heart is made straight, when what Isaiah says comes about:

*Return, ye transgressors, to the heart*. [Is 46.8]

That is, return to understanding, you who have lived like beasts. And again:

*Return as you had deeply revolted, O children of Israel*. [Is 31.6]

And again:

*If you seek, seek: return, come*. [Is 21.12]

That is, if you seek my help in adversity, seek it also in prosperity. Turn again to me in heart, and come in your deeds.

There follows: *And the rough ways plain*. [Lk 3.5]

This is what Isaiah says:

*They shall feed in the ways: and their pastures shall be in every plain.*

*They shall not hunger, nor thirst: neither shall the heat nor the sun strike them.*

*For he that is merciful to them shall be their shepherd,*

*and at the fountains of waters he shall give them drink*. [Is 49.9-10]

The rough ways are the hearts of violent men, which become plain when they are rendered meek and gentle. This is what it says in the fourth book of Kings, where Isaiah says:

*Bring me a lump of figs. And when they had brought it, and laid it upon Ezechias' boil, he was healed*. [4(2)Kg 20.7]

The ulcer in the flesh represents violence in the mind; the lump of figs is meekness and a gentle disposition, which is the cure for the ulcer of violence. Whence it says in Proverbs:

*by patience a prince shall be appeased:*

*and a soft tongue shall break hardness*. [Prov 25.15]

There follows: *And all flesh shall see the salvation of God*. [Lk 3.6]

That is, every man shall see Jesus Christ in the judgement. The wicked will see, to their shame, the one they have pierced [cf. Jn 19.37]; whence Isaiah says:

*In the land of the saints he hath done wicked things:*

*and he shall not see the glory of the Lord*. [Is 26.10]

The Septuagint translates:

*The wicked man shall be taken away, so that he may not see the brightness of God*.

The just, however, as Isaiah says, *shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall convert Sion* [Is 52.8].

14. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause: *Judge not before the time* [1Cor 4.5]. This is against those who, as Isaiah says:

*Woe to you that call evil good, and good evil:*

*that put darkness for light, and light for darkness;*

*that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter*. [Is 5.20]

*Until the Lord come*. Whence Isaiah:

*Behold, the Lord God shall come with strength: and his arm shall rule.*

*Behold, his reward* (universal retribution) *is with him,*

*and his work is before him;* [Is 40.10]

that is, his Cross and the instruments of his Passion whereby he has *worked salvation in the midst of the earth* [Ps 73.12], to the shame of the reprobate.

*Who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness;*

of which Isaiah says:

*The light of Israel shall be as a fire, and the Holy One thereof as a flame*. [Is 10.17]

A light to enlighten, a fire to test, a flame to burn up.

*And will make manifest the counsel of the hearts,*

as Isaiah says:

*Because the daughters of Sion are haughty* (with proud hearts)

*and have walked with stretched-out necks* (arrogance in demeanour)

*and wanton glances of their eyes* (lust)

*and made a noise as they walked with their feet,*

*and moved in a set pace* (showing frivolity and fickleness):

then on the Day of Judgement:

*The Lord will make bald the crown of the head of the daughters of Sion* (he will lay bare what is hidden, and expose the shame of baldness):

*and the Lord will discover their hair* (their thoughts and schemes).

This is the disgrace of the wicked.

But then, when *all flesh shall see the salvation of God* [Lk 3.6], *every just man shall have praise from God* [1Cor 4.5]. So Isaiah says:

*Say to the just man that it is well*. [Is 3.10]

Because that praise and glory of the saints cannot be expressed, Isaiah does not say how great it is, or what it is like, but just says: *It is well*.

Let us then, beloved brothers, ask the Lord Jesus Christ to bring low the mountains, make straight the crooked, and smooth the rough ways: that we may merit to attain to that 'well' which the eye does not see because it is hidden, nor the ear hear because it is quiet, nor does it enter the heart of man, because it is incomprehensible. May he grant this, who was humble in his first coming, but who in his second will be terrible, loveable, sweet and desirable, and blessed for ever and ever. Let every humble soul say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

1 cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Is 40.9

2 OVID, *Epistolae ex Ponto* II,3,53

3 GREGORY, *Moralia* IV, 18,34; PL 82.558

4 AUGUSTINE, *Soliloquia* II,1; PL 32.885

5 GUIGO THE CARTHUSIAN, *Epistola ad fratres*, I,15,46; PL 184.338

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

**(The Gospel for the first Sunday after the Nativity of the Lord: *Joseph and Mary*; which is divided into two clauses)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon on the grace and glory of Jesus Christ: *Learn where is wisdom*.)**

1. At that time: *Joseph and Mary the mother of Jesus were wondering at those things which were spoken concerning him*. [Lk 2.33]

Baruch says:

*Learn where is wisdom, where is prudence, where is strength, where is understanding: that thou mayest know also where is length of life and nourishment, where is the light of the eyes and peace.* [Bar 3.14]

It says in the Psalm:

*The Lord will give grace and glory*, [Ps 83.12]

grace in the present, glory in the future. The first four things mentioned in the previous text refer to grace, the other four to glory.

*Wisdom* is in the savouring of contemplation;

*Prudence* is in foreseeing dangers;

*Strength* is in bearing adversities;

*Understanding* is in rejecting evil and choosing good.

Again:

*Length of days* will belong to the saints in eternal blessedness

(hence: *I live, and you will live* [Jn 14.19]);

*Nourishment* will be in the fruition of joy

(hence: *I dispose to you a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table* [Lk 22.29-30]);

*Light of days* will be in the vision of Christ's glorified humanity

(hence: *Father, I will that where I am, they also whom thou hast given me may be with me; that they may see my glory, which thou hast given me* [Jn 17.24]);

*Peace* will be in the glorification of body and soul

(hence: *Thou wilt keep peace: peace, because we have hoped in thee, O Lord* [Is 26.3]).

Of length of days and the light of the eyes, the Psalm says:

*For with thee is the fountain of life; and in thy light we shall see light*. [Ps 35.10]

Of peace and nourishment:

*Who hath placed peace in thy borders: and filleth thee with the fat of corn*. [Ps 147.14]

The 'fat of corn' is the fruition of joy in the humanity of Jesus Christ, by which the saints are satisfied.

Alternatively: *Learn*, O man, to love Jesus, and then you will learn *where wisdom is*, etc.

He himself is wisdom; whence Proverbs:

*Wisdom hath built herself a house*, etc. [Prov 9.1]

He is prudence; whence Job:

*His* (the Father's) *prudence has struck the proud one* (the devil). [Job 26.12]

He is strength; whence:

*He is the strength of God and the wisdom of God*. [1Cor 1.24]

In him is all understanding, to whose eyes

*All things are naked and open*. [Heb 4.12]

He is life; he says:

*I am the way, the truth and the life*. [Jn 14.6]

He is nourishment, the *bread of angels* and refreshment of the just.

He is the light of the eyes; he says:

*I am the light of the world*. [Jn 8.12]

*He is our peace, who hath made both one*. [Eph 2.14]

Learn this wisdom, O man, that you may be wise;

this prudence, that you may take care of yourself;

this strength, that you may be strong;

this understanding, that you may know;

this nourishment, that you may not faint;

this light, that you may see;

this peace, that you may have rest.

O blessed Jesus, where may I seek you? Where may I find you? Where, when you are found, may I find so great a good? Seek, and you shall find. And where, pray, does it dwell*? Where it lies hid at noon-day?* [cf. Cant 1.6] Do you want to hear where? Say, I beseech you! You will find Jesus in the midst of Joseph and Mary, Simeon and Anna. That is why today's Gospel says: *There were Joseph and Mary*, etc.

2. There are four persons presented in this Gospel, and so let us see what they signify morally. Joseph means 'increasing', Mary 'star of the sea', Simeon 'hearing sadness', and Anna 'answering'. Joseph represents poverty, Mary humility, Simeon penitence, and Ann obedience. We will treat each of these in turn.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(On poverty: *God hath made me to grow*.)**

3. Joseph means ‘increasing’ [Gen 49.22]. When wretched man abounds in pleasure and expands in riches, he actually decreases, because he loses his freedom. Care for riches makes him a slave, and while he serves riches he shrinks down into himself. Unhappy soul, less than his own possessions! He is less, because he supposes himself to be for things, rather than things for him. This servile regard is recognised more clearly when he loses with sorrow what he possessed with joy. Such sorrow is a great slavery. What more? There is no freedom, save in voluntary poverty. This is Joseph who increases, who says in Genesis:

*God hath made me to grow in the land of my poverty*. [Gen 41.52[

In the land of my poverty, not of my abundance, God made me grow. In the former there is growth, in the latter decrease. So the second book of Kings speaks of:

*David prospering and growing always stronger and stronger,*

*but the house of Saul decaying daily*. [2Kg(Sm) 3.1]

David, who says in the Psalm: *I am a beggar and poor* [Ps 39.18], *went forward as a shining light and increased even to perfect day* [Prov 4.18]; and he became stronger in himself, as cheerful and voluntary poverty gave him strength. So Isaiah says:

*The spirit of the mighty* (i.e. poverty)

*is like a whirlwind beating against a wall* (i.e. riches). [Is 25.4]

Pleasures and riches waste and weaken. So Jeremiah says:

*How long wilt thou be dissolute in delights, O wandering daughter?* [Jer 31.22]

**(On the wretchedness of riches: *May the Lord afflict thee with want*.)**

The house of Saul (meaning ‘misusing’), of the rich men of this world who misuse the goods and gifts of the Lord in bodily pleasure, decreases daily. So Moses says in Deuteronomy:

*May the Lord afflict thee with miserable want,*

*with the fever and with cold,*

*with burning and with heat,*

*and with corrupted air and with blasting:*

*and pursue thee till thou perish*. [Dt 28.22]

The Lord afflicts (that is, he allows to be afflicted) the rich man of this world

with want, because he is always in need;

with fever, because he is tormented and saddened by others' happiness;

with cold, for fear of losing what he has gained;

with the heat of greed, the corrupt air of ill-repute, and the blight of lust.

See how the house of Saul decays! The house of David, however, poor and needy, grows from strength to strength in the land of his poverty.

**(On humility, the damnation of the proud and the exaltation of the humble: *God looked through the pillar of cloud*.)**

4. There follows, regarding humility, Mary, 'star of the sea'. O humility! Radiant star that enlightens the night and guides us to harbour, "like a glittering flame that shows forth God the King of kings," who says:

*Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart*. [Mt 11.29]

Whoever lacks this star is *groping blindly* [2Pt 1.9]. His ship is wrecked by the storm, and he himself sinks beneath the waves. So in Exodus:

*The Lord, looking upon the Egyptian army through the pillar of fire and cloud, slew their host; and overthrew the wheels of the chariots, and they were carried into the deep. But the children of Israel marched through the midst of the sea upon dry land: and the waters were to them as a wall on the right hand and on the left*. [Ex 14.24-25,29]

The Egyptians, overshadowed by the dark cloud, stand for the rich and powerful of this world, clouded by the darkness of pride. The Lord will slay them, overthrowing the wheels of their chariots- their dignities and glory around which the four seasons of the year turn for them- and drowning them in the depths of hell. But the children of Israel, enlightened by the fiery splendour, stand for the penitent and poor in spirit, enlightened by the splendour of humility. They pass dry-shod through the sea of this world, whose waters and bitter floods are for them like a wall which strengthens and defends them against prosperity on the right and adversity on the left, so that they are not elated by popular favour, nor yet cast down by the temptations of the flesh.

Deuteronomy says of them: *They shall suck as milk the abundance of the sea* [Dt 33.19].

To suck, one must compress the lips. The man whose mouth gapes open for monetary gain, for the service of vainglory, or for popular acclaim: such a one cannot suck the abundance of the sea. How hard it is to separate wolves from a corpse, ants from a seed, flies from honey, moths from wine, harlots from their prostitution or traders from the market place! Solomon likewise says in Proverbs:

*A young man according to his way,*

*even when he is old he will not depart from it*. [Prov 22.6]

Only the humble, who compress their lips from the love of temporal things, can suck as milk the abundance of the sea.

O star of the sea! O humility of heart! It changes the bitter and fearful sea into sweet and soothing milk! How sweet is that bitterness to the humble! How light is tribulation! They bear it for Jesus' name. To Stephen the stones were sweet, to Lawrence the gridiron, to Vincent the coals of fire. For Jesus, *they sucked as milk the abundance of the sea*.

The word 'suck' also suggests eagerness and delight. Only humility knows how to suck tribulation and sorrow with eagerness of spirit and delight. So we read in Canticles:

*Who shall give thee to me for my brother,*

*sucking the breasts of my mother?* [Cant 8.1]

Three persons are implied: mother, sister and brother. The mother is penitence, whose two breasts are sorrow in contrition and tribulation in satisfaction. The sister is poverty, the brother is the spirit of humility. Sister Poverty says, then: *Who shall give you to me* for my brother, spirit of humility? That with eagerness you may *suck the breasts of our mother?* Behold the brother and sister, Joseph and Mary, bridegroom and bride, poverty and humility. *He that hath the bride is the bridegroom* [Jn 3.29]. Blessed is that poverty which weds humility as its bride.

**(On the useful sadness of penitents: *A sorrowful spirit*.)**

5. There follows, regarding the sorrow of penitence, *Simeon* ('hearing sorrow'). The Apostle says of this:

*The sorrow that is according to God worketh salvation*. [2Cor 7.10]

And Proverbs:

*A sorrowful spirit drieth up the bones*, [Prov 17.22]

(namely, from the fatness of wantonness and impudence). So Job says:

*He rebuketh also by sorrow in the bed;*

*and he maketh all his bones to wither.*

*Bread becometh abominable to him in his life,*

*and to his soul the meat which before he desired*. [Job 33.19-20]

The ‘bed’ is the pleasure of the flesh, in which the soul lies like a paralytic, enfeebled in all his limbs. So it says in Matthew:

*They brought to him one sick of the palsy lying in a bed*. [Mt 9.2]

The Lord ‘rebukes by sorrow in a bed’ when he induces sorrow for sins in the soul, as it takes its ease in the pleasures of the flesh; and it then has the sorrow that ‘makes all its bones to wither’.

This is what Daniel said when he beheld the vision:

*There remained no strength in me,*

*and the appearance of my countenance was changed to me,*

*and I fainted away and retained no strength*. [Dan 10.8]

When this happens to someone, ‘bread’ (the pleasure of the flesh) ‘becomes abominable in his life’, and ‘the meat which was formerly desirable’ to his soul (his animal nature). Thus Daniel says:

*I ate no desirable bread, and neither flesh nor wine entered my mouth;*

*neither was I anointed with ointment*. [Dan 10.3]

Solomon says:

*The heart that knoweth the bitterness of his own soul,*

*in his joy the stranger shall not intermeddle*. [Prov 14.10]

Where the myrrh of sorrow is present, the worm of lust will not insinuate itself. So Isaiah says;

*Depart from me, I will weep bitterly.*

*Labour not to comfort me, for the devastation of the daughter of my people*. [Is 22.4]

This the way the penitent should speak to the unclean spirits: *Depart from me, I will weep bitterly*. Just as smoke drives out bees, so bitter and tearful compunction drives out the demons which stand around the soul like bees round a honeycomb. .And *labour not to comfort me*, you carnal affections, because as Job says:

*You are all troublesome comforters*. [Job 16.2]

*My soul refused to be comforted* with your comfort [Ps 76.3]. Your comforts (yours, Lord, not mine; for: *Woe to you who have your consolation* [Lk 6.24]) *have given joy to my soul* [Ps 93.19]. So *labour not to comfort me for the devastation* (the affliction) *of the daughter* (the flesh) *of my people* (the crowd of the five senses, of which the Psalm says: *Who subdueth my people under me* [Ps 143.2]).

**(On obedience: *Speak, Lord*.)**

6. There follows, regarding obedience, *Anna* (‘answering’). She answers with Samuel: *Speak. Lord, for thy servant heareth* [1Kg(Sm) 3.10); and with Isaiah: *Here I am, send me* [Is 6.8]; and with Saul: *Lord, what would you have me do?* [Ac 9.6]. Ecclesiasticus says:

*A mild answer breaketh wrath*; [Prov 15.1] and:

*A gracious tongue in a good man aboundeth*. [Ecclus 6.5]

The mild answer of the humble subject breaks the wrath of the proud prelate. Whence, in Proverbs:

*By patience* (of the subject) *a prince shall be appeased*. [Prov 25.5]

Ecclesiasticus says:

*Do not strive against the stream of the river*, [Ecclus 4.32]

(meaning the will of a prelate), but:

*Bow thy head to a great man*. [Ecclus 4.32]

The gracious tongue will abound in the good man who is subject, so that he may say with Job:

*Thou shalt call me, and I will answer thee*. [Job 14.15]

He answers the one who calls him, when he obeys from the heart the one who commands.

See then how we have taken a brief foretaste from these four virtues, so that whoever wishes to find Jesus should have these persons with him, because salvation rests in their midst. Joseph and Mary carried Jesus to the temple, Simeon and Anna confessed and blessed him. Poverty and humility bear the poor and humble Jesus. Poverty carries him on its shoulders.

**(For penitents and religious: *Issachar shall be a strong ass*.)**

7. So it says In Genesis:

*Issachar shall be a strong ass lying down in the borders. He saw rest that it was good; and the land that it was excellent, and he bowed his shoulders to carry*. [Gen 49.14-15]

Issachar means ‘reward’, and represents poverty, which abandons all temporal things so as to receive an eternal reward. He is called ‘a strong ass’, the ass being a beast of burden which eats rough and lowly food. Poverty, too, bears *the burden and heat of the day* [Mt 20.12], and uses what is rough and raw. St Bernard says: "Bread made of bran and pure water, together with herbs and plain vegetables, is by no means appetising; but in the love of Christ, and in the desire of inward satisfaction, it is pleasant enough to a well-disciplined digestion that is able to be satisfied with these things and give thanks for the. How many thousands of poor folk there are, who in the course of nature are satisfied with these, or even some of these! How easy and delightful it would be, with the condiment of God’s love, to live according to nature: if only our folly would let us!"

There follows: *He lies down in the borders* (rather than ‘between the borders’). There are two borders, the entrance to and exit from our life. In these, poverty lies down and rests. It considers how poor is man’s entry, and is present at his lowly departure. It does not want (as the book of Judges says)

*to lie down between the borders, to hear the bleatings of the flock*, [Jg 5.16]

the persuasive suggestions of the demons. He dwells or lies down ‘between the borders’ who pays no heed to the beginning or end of his life, but takes his rest in the pleasures of the flesh and the vanity of the world.

There follows: *He saw rest* (heavenly blessedness) *that it was good; and the land* (eternal stability) *that it was excellent, and he bowed his shoulders to carry*- to carry the poor Jesus, the Son of God. He 'carries' Jesus who, for love of him, bears patiently all the adverse things that happen to him. So Ecclesiasticus says:

*Take all that shall be brought upon thee: and in thy sorrow endure*. [Ecclus 2.4]

In this way poverty bears 'on its shoulders', while humility bears at the breast and in the arms. So Canticles says:

*A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me: he shall abide between my breasts*. [Cant 1.12]

The word used is a diminutive: 'a little bundle', meaning humility. Myrrh represents the bitterness of the Lord's Passion. The heart lies between the breasts, so it as if the humble Bride would say, "I carry my beloved Jesus in my heart, a bundle of myrrh humble and crucified, so that I may be humble in heart, and my body fastened with him to the Cross." Thus poverty and humility carry Jesus to the temple, that is to say, until they come to the temple of the heavenly Jerusalem, not made with hands.

Again, penitence and obedience confess and bless. The Psalm says:

*Praise and beauty are before him*, [Ps 95.6]

like a penitent whose beauty is in his confession. Confession cleanses the leper of sin, and adorns him with the grace of the Holy Spirit. So the Psalm says:

*Thou hast put on praise and beauty*: [Ps 103.2]

that is, penitents who are cleansed by confession and adorned with grace. There follows:

*Holiness and majesty in his sanctuary*, [Ps 95.6]

like an obedient man whom the Lord sanctifies with holiness of conscience in the mortification of his self-will, and with majesty of life in the carrying out of another's will. Behold where the King of virtues dwells! Have these virtues, then, and you will find the wisdom of God and the virtue of God: Jesus-

Whom, beloved brothers, let us humbly implore to build, with these four pillars, the house of our way of life; so that he may dwell with us and we with him. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(The theme for a sermon on pride and humility of heart: *He hath put down the mighty*.)**

8. *Simeon said to Mary his mother: Behold, this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel*. [Lk 2.34]

Blessed Mary says in her canticle:

*He hath put down the mighty from their seat,*

*and hath exalted the humble and meek*. [Lk 1.52]

'He hath put down': that is, he has thrust downwards. The Lord says in the prophet Obadiah:

*The pride of thy heart hath lifted thee up,*

*who dwellest in the clefts of the rock and setteth up thy throne on high,*

*who sayest in thy heart: Who shall bring me down to the ground?*

*Though thou be exalted as an eagle and though thou set thy nest among the stars,*

*thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord*. [Ob 1.3-4]

(see the Gospel: *A sower went forth to sow his seed* [Sexagesima], and the Gospel: *A blind man sat by the way* [Quinquagesima].)

So: *He hath put down the mighty*. This is what is said in Daniel:

*Behold, a watcher and a holy one came down from heaven,*

*and cried aloud, and said thus:*

*Cut down the tree and chop off the branches thereof:*

*shake off its leaves and scatter its fruits*. [Dan 4.10-11]

The great tree stands for the mighty of this world who, as Job says:

*hath stretched out his hand against God,*

*and hath strengthened himself against the Almighty*. [Job 15.25]

He is cut down by certain death, he is dragged down to hell, and there his 'branches' (the might of his parents, the nobility of his birth of which he used to brag and boast) are chopped off. His 'leaves' (the windy words of pride) are shaken off; and the 'fruits' of riches and pleasure, which he amassed to his own harm, are scattered.

Thus has he *brought down the mighty from their seat*; and *he has exalted the humble*. This is what Job says:

*He comforteth with health those that mourn*. [Job 5.11]

And again:

*When thou shalt think thyself consumed, thou shalt rise as the daystar.*

*And thou shalt have confidence, hope being set before thee.* [Job 11.17-18]

He brought proud Haman low, and raised up humble Mardochaeus. The former fell from his seat, the latter rose in his place. Well, then, does blessed Mary say: *He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble*. That is why Simeon says to her, of her Son: *Behold, this child is set for the fall of many*, etc. He himself says, in John:

*For judgement I am come into this world; that they who see not may see;*

*and they who see may become blind*. [Jn 9.39]

Isaiah says of this fall:

*Jerusalem is ruined, and Juda is fallen: because their tongue* (which cried: *Crucify him, crucify him!* [Jn 19.6])

*and their schemes* (*He said: I can destroy this temple made with hands*, etc. [Mt 26.61])

*are against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his majesty*. [Is 3.8]

**(On the useful ruin for converted sinners: *The destruction of the horse*.)**

9. Morally. Ecclesiasticus says:

*Turn the wicked and he* (the wicked man) *shall not be*. [Prov 12.7]

Saul the persecutor fell, Paul the preacher arose. This, then, is: *Behold, he is set for the fall* of sinners. Zechariah speaks of:

*The destruction of the horse and of the mule and of the camel and of the ass and of all the beasts*. [Zech 14.15]

The horse is pride, as Jeremiah says:

*They are all turned to their own course, as a horse rushing to the battle*. [Jer 8.6]

The mule is lust, as the Psalm says:

*Do not become like the horse and the mule*. [Ps 31.9]

The camel is avarice; so that the camel (the avaricious man) *cannot pass through the eye of the needle* (the poverty of Jesus Christ) [cf. Mt 19.24].

The ass is laziness, the sump of all vices. The ass *avoids high ground*, and laziness will not aspire to the heights, but looks for easy ways to go. Thus Abraham told his servants: *Stay you here with the ass*. [Gen 22.5]

The servants are childish and carnal affections, which remain with the ass of slackness and slowness.

The beasts represent delight in the pleasures of the five senses, of which Isaiah says:

*The burden of the beasts of the south.*

*In a land of trouble and distress,*

*from whence come the lioness and the lion, the viper and the flying basilisk*. [Is 30.6]

The 'land' is the flesh, which brings forth for us the thorns of trouble and the thistles of sorrow. This is 'the burden of the beasts', the five senses. They are 'beasts of the south', worldly joys. In this land of trouble and sorrow, which the beasts trample and drop their dung on, there are the lioness of lust, the lion of pride, the viper of wrath and the flying basilisk of envy and vainglory.

O Lord Jesus, let all these beasts and cattle be destroyed, that the beast-like sinner may likewise fall and, having fallen, rise again as a spiritual man. Let us say, then: Behold, he is set for a fall.

**(On the resurrection of the soul from sin: *The hand of the Lord was upon me*; and**

**on the nature of sinews.)**

10. There follows: *And for the resurrection of many*. There is a **concordance** to this in Ezekiel:

*The hand of the Lord was upon me and brought me forth into a plain that was full of bones... Now they were very many... and they were exceeding dry... And he said to me: Son of man, prophesy concerning these bones and say to them: ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord... Behold, I will send spirit into you and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you and will cause flesh to grow over you and will cover you with skin*. [Ezek 37.1,2,4,5,6]

The ‘dry bones’ are sinners, parched of the moisture of grace, *whose heart is withered, because they forgot to eat their bread* [Ps 101.5], which contained *all that is delicious and the sweetness of every taste* [Wisd 16.20]. Job says, regarding them:

*The bones of Behemoth are like pipes of brass*. [Job 40.13]

They are perverse in malice, hard as the devil’s bones, because they support what is carnal as bones support the flesh. They are like pipes of brass, because like brass they repel the arrows of preaching, and when struck send out an echoing sound. They confess Christ in words (like a pipe), but deny him by their deeds (the hardness of bronze).

But because the mercy of Christ himself is greater than the dryness and hardness of the bones, he adds: *And I will put spirit into you, and you will live*, etc. Note these four things: ‘spirit’, ‘sinews’, ‘flesh’ and ‘skin’. The ‘spirit’ represents the inspiration of prevenient grace, the ‘sinews’ the joining together of good intentions, the ‘flesh’ compassion towards one’s neighbour, and the ‘skin’ the extension of final perseverance. *I will put spirit into you, and you will live*; just as Genesis says: *He breathed into his face the breath of life* [Gen 2.7]. (See the Gospel: *Jesus was led into the desert* [Lent I].)

11. *And I will lay sinews upon you*. There are many sinews in the hands and the feet, and around the ribs and shoulders; and the bones which are connected to one another are bound with sinew. Round them is a certain moistness, from which they grow and derive nourishment. When the Lord sends the spirit of grace into a sinner, the moisture of compunction arises in his heart, and from this the sinews of good impulses and good will grow and are nourished, so joining together and binding the whole body of good works.

*And I will make flesh to grow*. The same prophet says:

*I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh,*

*and will give you a heart of flesh*, [Ezek 36.26]

which, when pierced, grieves with compassion for the neighbour, because *He is our flesh and our brother* [Gen 37.27]. O stony heart, which will not be moved by compassion for neighbour! Which says: *Am I my brother's keeper?* [Gen 4.9] You shall learn that *in keeping him there is great reward* [Ps 18.12]. The first book of Kings tells how *Nabal's heart died within him, and he became as a stone* [1Kg(Sm) 25.37]. He would have no compassion on David, would not give him anything from his store, but only hurled abuse at him, saying:

*Who is David? And what is the son of Isai? Servants are multiplied nowadays, who flee from their masters. Shall I take my bread and my water, and the flesh of my cattle, which I have killed for my shearers, and give them to men whom I know not whence they are?* [1Kg(Sm) 25.10-11]

Nowadays, the avaricious and usurious, with their stony hearts, say these and similar things to the poor of Jesus Christ.

*And I will cover you with skin*. The covering of skin is final perseverance. The Lord says:

*You are those who have remained with me in my trials*- [Lk 22.28]

but woe to those who lack perseverance! Job says:

*My skin is withered and drawn together*. [Job 7.5]

The skin withers and contracts when it is stripped of the good works of final perseverance. Thus:

*In the end of a man is the disclosing of his works*. [Ecclus 11.29]

Then his baseness will be apparent.

This foreshadows the way the Lord gives life to the dry bones, he who >is set for the resurrection of many.

12. There follows: *And a sign which shall be contradicted*. Matthew says:

*Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven*. [Mt 24.30]

And Isaiah:

*Upon the dark mountain lift ye up a banner.*

*Exalt the voice, lift up the hand*. [Is 13.2]

The ‘dark mountain’ is the devil: a mountain because of his pride, and dark because of the darkness of temptation that he brings upon the mind. Preachers ‘lift up a banner’ upon him when they preach that he is conquered by the power of the Cross. They ‘exalt their voices’ when they *argue in season, our of season, reprove and entreat* [2Tim 4.2]. They ‘lift up their hand’ when they practise what they preach.

Again, the Lord says of this sign, in Ezekiel:

*Mark Thau upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and mourn for all the abominations that are committed in the midst thereof*. [Ezek 9.4]

Only these do not contradict the sign of the Lord’s Passion which they bear upon their foreheads. Who are the people that sigh and mourn, if not the penitent and the poor in spirit, who glory in the Cross of Christ, and sigh and mourn for the abominations committed in the world? Those who are faithless contradict in word and deed. So the Apostle says:

*We preach Christ crucified; unto the Jews indeed a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness*. [1Cor 1.23]

Isaiah says:

*Woe unto him that gainsayeth his maker, a shard of the earthen pots!* [Is 45.9]

(The Latin contains a reference to ‘Samian ware’, from Samos where the art of pottery was practised.) The baked pot is the false Christian, hard from lack of devotion yet fragile in deed, a thing of clay. He contradicts his maker, Christ who formed him with hands nailed to the Cross; and even though he should not stand by him, he restored him to his first dignity. Why then does such a wretch contradict his maker and redeemer by the testimony of an evil life?

**(Against the lovers of temporal things: *I spread forth my hands*.)**

13. Therefore he complains in Isaiah:

*I have spread forth my hands all the day to an unbelieving people,*

*who walk in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts.*

*A people that continually provoke me to anger before my face:*

*that immolate in gardens and sacrifice upon bricks:*

*that dwell in sepulchres and sleep in the temples of idols:*

*that eat swine's flesh and profane broth in their vessels*. [Is 65.2-4]

*I have spread forth*: like a generous benefactor who denies nothing to those who ask; as Proverbs says:

*I stretched out my hand, and there was none that regarded*. [Prov 1.24]

In the first Advent the Lord's hand was spread out; but in the second it will be closed, and he will strike with his fist, and:

*He shall break the grinders of the lions*. [Ps 57.7]

*I have spread forth my hands*: upon the Cross. So Canticles says:

*His hands are turned and as of gold, full of hyacinths*. [Cant 5.14]

The hands of Christ are said to be 'turned', from the torture of the Passion when they were pierced with nails as on a carpenter's bench. They are 'of gold' because of the purity of his work; and 'full of hyacinths', the rewards of eternal life. Of these, the thief received the first hyacinth when he heard: *Today you will be with me in paradise* [Lk 23.24].

He says: *All the day;* and night, because when the day of worldly prosperity smiles upon us, then we should be mindful of the death of Jesus Christ. Thus it is said that *the sun was darkened* at his death [Lk 23.45]. The sun of worldly glory should be darkened for us in the memory of the Lord's Passion.

He says: *I spread forth... to an unbelieving people*. Isaiah says:

*He that is unfaithful dealeth unfaithfully*. [Is 21.2]

St Augustine says, "To believe in God is to love God, and go into him, and be incorporated with his members." Whoever does not do this is lying when he says, "I believe in God." The unfaithful man is one who does not believe in this way, and so deals unfaithfully. His faith is dead, because it lacks charity.

*Who walk in a way that is not good*; the wide and spacious way, that leads to death [cf. Mt 7.13]. There is something similar in Proverbs:

*A man that is an apostate, an unprofitable man, walketh with a perverse mouth.*

*He winketh with the eyes, presseth with the foot, speaketh with the finger*. [Prov 6.12-13]

*After their own thoughts*: of which the book of Wisdom says:

*Perverse thoughts separate from God*. [Wisd 1.3] and:

*The Holy Spirit... will withdraw himself from the thoughts that are without understanding*. [Wisd 1.5]

*A people that provoke me to anger* (that is, to anger, by their continual sinning.) Zephaniah says:

*Woe to the provoking and redeemed city*. [Zeph 3.1]

This is as if to say, "They provoke me to wrath, whom I redeemed with my blood."

*Before my face continually*: that is, openly- which is even worse. Isaiah says:

*They have proclaimed abroad their sin as Sodom, and they have not hid it*. [Is 3.9]

*That immolate in gardens*: a reference to lust; whence Isaiah says:

*You shall be ashamed of the gardens* (the places of pleasure)

*which you have chosen* (by your lust). [Is 1.29]

*And sacrifice upon bricks*: a reference to avarice. Whence Exodus says:

*Straw shall nor be given you: and you shall deliver the accustomed number of bricks*. [Ex 5.18]

Time after time it happens that the straw of riches is taken away from the avaricious and usurers, and yet they continue to deliver to the devil the bricks of avarice, at least in will and word. Alternatively, those who ‘sacrifice upon bricks’ are those who perform the Divine Office to the Lord by the fireside, or in bed, or in some such manner.

*That dwell in sepulchres*: a reference to detraction:

*Their throat is an open sepulchre*, etc. [Ps 13.3]

*And sleep in the temples of idols*: meaning hypocrisy, which assumes the appearance of

religion, as an idol does, but is lacking in truth and reality. Alas! How many idol-worshippers there are today, praying to an image which only pretends to a holiness which is foreign to it.

*That eat swine's flesh*, in the defilement of gluttony; *and profane broth in their vessels*: that is, in their hearts, a reference to unclean thoughts. Those who do all these things contradict the sign of the Lord's Passion.

**(On the two-fold giving birth of blessed Mary: *Before she was in labour*; and on her Son's Passion: *Remember my poverty*.)**

14. There follows: *And thy own soul a sword shall pierce*. [Lk 2.35]

The grief that blessed Mary endured in the Passion of her Son was like a sword that pierced her soul. As Isaiah says:

*Before she was in labour, she brought forth*. [Is 66.7]

Blessed Mary's childbearing was twofold- in the flesh and in the spirit. The physical birth was virginal and full of joy, because the Virgin bore the joy of the angels without pain, saying with Sarah:

*God hath made a laughter for me. Whosoever shall hear of it will laugh with me*. [Gen 21.6]

We should laugh and rejoice together with blessed Mary in the birth of her Son; we should also sorrow with her in his Passion, the sword of which pierced her soul. Then was the second birth, grievous and full of all bitterness. No wonder, when she saw the Son of God (whom by the action of the Holy Spirit she had conceived as a virgin, and bore as a virgin) nailed to the wood and hanging between thieves! What wonder that a sword pierced her soul!

*Attend and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow*. [Lam 1.12]

Before she was in labour in the Passion, she brought forth in the Nativity.

15. Morally. In Lamentations, Jeremiah speaks to the Father in the person of Christ:

*Remember my poverty and transgression: the wormwood and the gall*. [Lam 3.19]

The Passion of Christ is called a 'transgression' inasmuch as it surpassed the sorrow and suffering of all the martyrs. Thus St Luke says that Moses and Elias spoke of the 'departure', his Passion, exceeding every suffering- which he should accomplish in Jerusalem [Lk 9.31]. When the just man beholds this, he immediately adds what follows

in Lamentations:

*I will be mindful and remember: and my soul shall languish within me*. [Lam 3.20]

O Son of God, *I will be mindful and remember* (the redoubling of the words expresses the depth of the speaker's emotion) *thy poverty*, which was so great that in death you had no winding-sheet to wrap you, no tomb to be buried in, if it had not been granted you as a poor beggar by the care of mercy and almsgiving; *and thy transgression*, the Passion which exceeded all human sorrow. So John says:

*Jesus went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron*. [Jn 18.1]

The word means 'bitter grief'. In the Passion all grief and bitterness were exceeded. All the martyrs, before they underwent their passion, were ignorant of the magnitude of suffering that would be involved, and so suffered less than if they had known. But the Lord, who knew everything beforehand, knew entirely (even before reaching his Passion) the force of the pain; and so it is no wonder that he suffered more than all others. The wormwood and the gall: of which the Psalm says:

*And they gave me gall for my food*, [Ps 68.22]

said to have been ox-gall, the bitterest of all. When I remember this, my soul languishes within me as the sword of your Passion pierces it.

When this happens, as the text goes on, *the thoughts of many hearts are revealed* [Lk 2.35]. This is what Job says:

*He discovereth deep things out of darkness,*

*and bringeth up to light the shadow of death*. [Job 12.22]

When the Lord pierces the soul with the sword of his Passion, then he uncovers deep things out of darkness, those vices which are far from ever finding satisfaction (for they *never say: Enough! but always, Bring, bring* [cf. Prov 30.15]); that is, he turns blindness of mind into contrition of heart, so that a man may first know and then reveal them in confession- the meaning of the further words, *and bringeth up to light* (confession) *the shadow of death* (mortal sin).

**(On the four seasons of the year and their significance: *When the fulness of time was come*.)**

16. The following part of today's Epistle is **concordant** to this clause: *When the fulness of time was come* [Gal 4.4]. For indeed *there is a time for every business* [Eccles 8.6]; and if *a wise man will hold his peace until he see opportunity* [Ecclus 20.7], then it is

probable that God, in the business of human salvation and the sending forth of his Word, would observe a suitable time. Note that there are four seasons in the year: winter, spring, summer and autumn. From Adam to Moses it was, as it were, winter:

*Death reigned from Adam to Moses*. [Rom 5.14]

The period from Moses to Christ was spring. In this spring-time the flowers began to bud, promising fruit. When summer came, the fulness of time when the trees are replete with fruit, then:

*God sent his Son, made of a woman*. [Gal 4.4]

There is a **concordance** to this in Leviticus:

*I will give you rain in due season,*

*and the ground shall bring forth its increase, and the trees shall be filled with fruit.*

*The threshing of your harvest shall reach unto the vintage,*

*and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time:*

*and you shall eat your bread to the full*. [Lev 26.3-5]

The Lord gave rain, *like dew upon the ground and rain upon the fleece* [cf. Jg 6.4)], when at the angel's message the Virgin conceived the Son of God. The earth brought forth its increase when the Virgin herself brought forth the Saviour of the world, at whose preaching and miraculous works 'the trees' (the Apostles) were filled with all the fruits of virtue. And 'the threshing of the harvest', the Lord's Passion in which *he was afflicted for our sins* [Is 53.5], reached 'the vintage', the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit by which the Apostles were inebriated; for the crowd

"... mocked, as overcome with wine, those who were filled with power divine."

And the vintage reached the 'sowing time', their preaching; for they immediately began to preach and say:

*Do penance; and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ*. [Ac 2.38]

Autumn will come in heavenly blessedness, wherein the saints will eat their bread to the full, and will sit (as Micah says):

*Every man... under his vine and under his fig-tree,*

*and there shall be none to make them afraid*. [Mic 4.4]

There follows: *Made under the Law*, [Gal 4.4]

that is, subject to the observances of the Law; he said: *I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil*. [Mt 5.17]

*that he might redeem those who were under the Law*;

There is something similar in the Epistle to the Hebrews:

*That, through death, he might destroy him who had the empire of death, that is to say, the devil; and might deliver them who through the fear of death were all their lifetime subject to servitude*. [Heb 2.14-15]

Here you can see plainly how he was set for the downfall of the devils and the resurrection of many; so there follows:

*that we might receive the adoption of sons*.

What grace! He adopted slaves as sons!

*And if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ*. [Rom 8.17]

**(On the Annunciation or the Nativity of the Lord: *When all things were in deep silence*.)**

17. The Introit of today's Mass is **concordant** to this part of the Epistle:

*While all things were in mid-silence,*

*and the night was in the midst of her course,*

*thy almighty Word leapt down from thy royal throne,*

*as a fierce conqueror into midst of the land of destruction,*

*a sharp sword carrying thy unfeigned commandment.*

*And he stood and filled all things with death:*

*and standing on the earth reached even to heaven*. [Wisd 18.14-16]

This is the literal text in the book of Wisdom: *When all things were in quiet silence*.

This is what the Lord says in Luke:

*When a strong man armed* (i.e. the devil)

*keepeth his court* (the world, or hell)

*those things are in peace which he possesseth*. [Lk 11.21]

Thus Sennacherib (an image of the devil himself) says in Isaiah:

*My hand hath found the strength of the people as a nest* (how the weak guard themselves);

*and as eggs are gathered that are left* (by their mother)

*so have I gathered all the earth*.

*And there was none that moved the wing* (raised a hand against me),

*or opened the mouth, or made the least noise*. [Is 10.14]

This is how *quiet silence held all things*.

*And the night was in the midst of her course*.

'Midst' is relative to extremes, the extreme points of night being dusk and dawn. From Adam to the Law was, as it were, dusk. >From the Law to the Annunciation of blessed Mary was, as it were, the middle of the night, as regards disobedience to the Law. Neither Adam in paradise nor the people in the desert kept the Law; they were all overshadowed by the darkness of this night, and so they needed the benefit of the Lord's coming, which began with the angelic salutation. The beginning of night was when the devil, in the serpent, tempted Eve; the beginning of day was the angel's greeting to Mary. And then, Father, *thy almighty Word* (the Son consubstantial with you) *leapt down from thy royal throne*, the bosom of your majesty. As St John says:

*The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him*. [Jn 1.18]

*As a fierce conqueror*.

This is what is said in Luke:

*But if a stronger than he come upon him*. Lk 11.22]

He who came *to break the gates of brass and burst the fetters of iron* [Ps 106.16], must without a doubt be a 'fierce conqueror'. In Job, the Lord says of the devil that;

*He shall esteem iron a straw and brass as rotten wood.*

*The archer shall not put him to flight;*

*the stones of the sling are to him like stubble.*

*As stubble will he esteem the hammer,*

*and he will laugh him to scorn who shaketh the spear*. [Job 41.18-20]

What more?

*He was made to fear no-one*. [Job 41.24]

It was only right, then, that there should be a fierce conqueror, over whom he had no power, to come and despoil him.

*Into the midst of the land* ('middle earth', between heaven and hell)

*of destruction* (destroyed by the devil, placed outside the bounds of eternal life).

Isaiah says of him:

*Is this the man that troubled the earth, that shook kingdoms,*

*that made the world a wilderness and destroyed the cities thereof?* [Is 14.17]

*He leapt down* (upon the two feet of divinity and humanity).

*A sharp sword*.

The Apostle says this:

*The word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword*. [Heb 4.12]

This sword is the divinity, hidden in the sheath of humanity, for Isaiah says:

*Verily thou art a hidden God, the God of Israel, the Saviour*. [Is 45.15]

The devil, who destroyed the earth, was run through by this sword; so that as Isaiah says:

*The dust is at an end; the wretch is consumed;*

*he hath failed, that trod the earth under foot*. [Is 16.4]

18. *Carrying thy unfeigned commandment*.

John says: *The Father hath given everything into his hand* [Jn 13.3]; and again: *All things whatsoever the Father hath are mine* [Jn 16.15]; and: *All my things are thine, and thine are mine* [Jn 17.10]. He carried, then, the commandment of the Father who *gave him power over all flesh* [cf. Jn 17.2], and *his power is an everlasting power* [Dan 7.14], *who commandeth both the winds and the sea and they obey him* [Lk 8.25]. *Carrying an unfeigned commandment*; for as Mark says:

*He was teaching as one having power, and not as the scribes*, [Mk 1.22]

who taught hypocritically and insincerely. And in Luke:

*What word is this, for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they go out?* [Lk 4.36]

*And he stood and filled all things with death*:

He stood with arms outstretched on the Cross, and by his death filled all things that had been emptied by the disobedience of our first parents: *of whose fulness we have all received* [Jn 1.16].

*And standing on the earth* (meaning his humanity) *reached even to heaven* (the divine nature, that wisdom which *reacheth from end to end mightily* [Wisd8.1]). He says in John:

*No man hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended from heaven, the Son of man, who is in heaven*. [Jn 3.13]

Job says of him:

*He is higher than the heavens, and what wilt thou do?*

*He is deeper than hell, and how wilt thou know?*

*The measure of him is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea*. [Job 11.8-9]

Let us humbly beg him, beloved brothers, to make us die to sin and rise to virtue; to pierce our souls with the sword of his Passion, whereby we may be found fit to gain the joy of the general Resurrection. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

**(A moral sermon on penitence: *When all things were in quiet silence*.)**

19. *When all things were in quiet silence*.

This may be expounded morally. Job says of the devil:

*He sleepeth under the shadow, in the covert of the reed, and in moist places*. [Job 40.16]

The ‘shadow’ refers to pride, which is called the shadow of death, or of the devil. Just as a shadow follows the body, so pride follows the devil. Thus it says in the Apocalypse:

*And behold a pale horse; and he that sat upon him, his name was Death. And hell followed him*. [Apoc 6.8]

Behold horse, rider and shield-bearer. The ‘pale horse’ is the hypocrite; his rider, called Death, is the devil; the squire is hell, that is, pride, who feeds the horse with barley and water- austerity and abstinence- *so that he may be seen by men to fast* [Mt 6.16]. He saddles it with a feigned humility, and curbs it with the bit of silence; for as Solomon says:

*Even a fool, if he will hold his peace, shall be accounted wise*, [Prov 17.28]

and in the same way, a hypocrite is counted holy. Death mounts this horse and rides through the world, hunting praise- *salutations in the market-place, seats in the synagogue and the first places at banquets* [Mt 23.6-7]. There is no pride greater than that of a hypocrite, for "A pretended righteousness is no righteousness at all, but a double wickedness" The ‘reed’ (which ‘rushes’ to ruin!) is avarice; whose hollowness, which never says "Enough!", ruin follows. The ‘moist places’ represent gluttony and lust. Moistness is the source of corruption, generating worms and the like. The devil ‘sleeps’ or takes his rest in the proud, the avaricious and the lustful; and then ‘quiet silence’ envelops all their members. The heart utters no good thoughts, the tongue no praise of God, the hand no good deeds. Isaiah says:

*Woe is me, because I have held my peace*. [Is 6.5]

In such a silence there is the woe of eternal damnation.

*And the night was in the midst of her course*.

Night, which blinds the eyes, represents mortal sin which obscures the light of reason. *He who walks in the night, stumbleth* [cf. Jn 11.10]. The extremes of this night, its dusk and dawn, are the consent of the blinded mind and the infusion of grace. Between these are the act and habit of sin. It is of this 'mid-course' that the Psalmist says:

*The way of the wicked shall perish*. [Ps 1.6]

This happens when *the almighty Word leaps down*: the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is appropriately called an 'almighty word'. It is 'almighty' because it is able to break down every obstacle to salvation; it is a 'word' because it implants virtues in the mind, preserving the mind and healing it of sin. So the book of Wisdom says:

*It was neither herb* (riches which dry up quickly) *nor mollifying plaster, that healed them:*

*but thy word, O Lord, which healeth all things*. [Wisd 16.12]

From thy royal throne, of divine kindness and mercy. Whence Joel:

*Turn to the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful*. [Joel 2.13]

20. *As a fierce conqueror, in contrition*. Grace is called a fierce conqueror because it beats like a hammer upon the hardness of the heart:

*Are not my words as a fire... and as a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?* [Jer 23.29]

*Into the midst of the land*: meaning the mind of the sinner, called 'land' or 'earth' because it savours earthly things; the 'midst', because it is set between mercy and justice. So John tells how:

*Jesus alone remained, and the woman standing in the midst*, [Jn 8.9]

that is, between mercy and justice.

*Of destruction*. The entrance and the exit of our life are its two terms or boundaries. When the human mind does not dwell within them, when it does not think about them, then it is cast out of its bounds and is ex-terminated. Isaiah says:

*The cry is gone round about the border of Moab*, [Is 15.8]

meaning the sinner, whose two boundaries are marked by crying. When he comes into the world he cries and weeps, when he leaves it his family weeps for him. So

Ecclesiastes:

*The mourners shall go round about in the street*. [Eccles 12.5]

There follows: *A sharp sword*, in confession. Grace is like a sharp sword, when it sharpens the tongue of the sinner in confession, so that he can say with Isaiah:

*He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword*, [Is 49.2]

of which the Lord says in Ezekiel:

*And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife that shaveth the hair:*

*and cause it to pass over thy head and thy beard*. [Ezek 5.1]

With the sword of confession the sinner should shave his ‘head’ (his mind) so that no sin remains on his conscience; and his ‘beard’ (the strength of good works) so that he does not trust in himself, but in the Lord from whom all good comes.

So there follows: *Carrying thy unfeigned commandment*. True confession knows no pretence. It brings to light the truth of conscience, in the sight of the Almighty and of one’s confessor. Then it bears the unfeigned commandment of the Lord. Note that there are four enemies of confession: love of sin, shame of confessing, fear of penance and despair of pardon. Whoever entirely overcomes these four enemies in confession, beyond a doubt he bears the unfeigned commandment of the Lord.

There follows: *And he stood and filled all things with death*: in satisfaction. Grace ‘stands’ when it makes the penitent persevere manfully in penance, so that he fills all his members with ‘death’ in mortification; so that *being dead to sin he may be alive to God* [cf. Rom 6.11]. Then it can be said of him that *standing on the earth he reached even to heaven*. Grace, standing on the earth, reaches to heaven when it makes the penitent, while yet in the flesh, reach heaven in heavenly conversation; so that he can say with the Apostle: *Our conversation is in heaven* [Phil 3.20].

Let us ask the Lord Jesus, then, beloved brothers, to send the grace of the Holy Spirit into the midst of the land of destruction, to break the hardness of the heart, to sharpen the tongue in confession, and to fill the members of the body with mortification; whereby we may be enabled to reach heaven in heavenly conversation. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

NOTES

1. *BREVIARIUM ROMANUM*, Epiphany Lauds, Antiphon 5

2. Antony confuses Hannah ('grace') with Anah ('answering'.

3. GUIGO THE CARTHUSIAN, *Epistola ad fratres*, I,8,23; PL 184.323

4. Quoted in P. LOMBARD, *Sententiae III*, dist 23,4]

5. *BREVIARIUM ROMANUM*, Lauds hymn for Pentecost

6. AUGUSTINE, *Enarratio in Ps* 63.11; PL 36.765]

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

**(The Gospel for the second Sunday after the Nativity: *When Jesus was* [*twelve years old*], which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon in Lent for penitents: *Set your hearts*.)**

1. At that time: *When Jesus was twelve years old*, etc.

The Lord says in the prophet Haggai:

*Set your hearts upon your ways;*

*Go up to the mountains, bring timber and build the house*. [Hag 1.7-8]

Note that in these three words: ‘set’, ‘go up’ and ‘bring’, contrition, confession and satisfaction are denoted; whoever has these three is able to build a house to the name of the Lord. Our ‘ways’ are our actions; whence Jeremiah says:

*See thy ways in the valley, know what thou hast done*. [Jer 2.23]

(See the Gospel: *Jesus was casting out a demon* [Lent III].) To ‘set your heart on your ways’ is to think about what you have done, in contrition of heart. Thus the Psalm says:

*I have thought on my ways: and turned my feet unto thy testimonies*. [Ps 118.59]

But because few or none do this, the Lord complains in Jeremiah:

*I attended and hearkened; no man speaketh what is good.*

*There is none that doth penance for his sin, saying: What have I done?*

*They are all turned to their own course, as a horse rushing to the battle*. [Jer 8.6]

David, because he set his heart upon his ways, turned his feet (his affections) to the testimonies, the witness, of God. But others, because they do not think about what they have done, nor do penance for it, turn themselves to the course of temporal things. Whoever does not think about his inner state turns himself to outward and alien things. ‘Alien’ is whatever you cannot take with you in death. Set your heart on what is your own, not what is alien, because where your heart is, there your eye is; and where your eye is, your thought is. But when you know yourself, there is pardon.

So ‘set your heart on your ways’, and you will then be able to go up to the mountain which represents confession, which is *the mountain of God, a fat mountain* [Ps 67.15]. Of this fatness the Psalm says:

*Let my soul be filled as with marrow and fatness*. [Ps 62.6]

*Thou hast anointed my head* (my mind) *with oil* (in the lamp of confession);

*and my chalice* (the drink of tears), *how goodly it is*. [cf. Ps 22.5]

*O how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory!* [Wisd 4.1]

Confession, born of contrition, may be called a ‘generation’ whose beauty consists in purity and clarity. In purity, whereby all sins are revealed to a single priest, not divided among many; in clarity, so that the one confessing sheds tears with which the conscience may be cleansed.

There follows: *Bring timber*, which represents the satisfaction of penance. From the mountain of confession the penitent carries the wood of satisfaction. Note that just as Christ’s Cross had length and breadth, height and depth, so in the wooden cross of penance there should be ‘length’ in final perseverance, ‘breadth’ of charity, ‘height’ of hope and ‘depth’ of fear. From these the house of the Lord is built in the city of Jerusalem, of which today’s Gospel speaks:

*When Jesus was twelve years old they went up to Jerusalem,*

*according to the custom of the* feast. [Lk 2.42]

2. There are three things to note in this Gospel. First, the going of Jesus and his parents to Jerusalem: *When he was twelve*. Second, his finding after three days: *And it came to pass*. Third, his going down to Nazareth with his parents: *And he went down with them*, etc.

The Introit sung in today’s Mass is: *Upon a high throne*; and the Epistle of blessed Paul to the Romans is read, which we will divide into three parts and **concord** with the three clauses of the Gospel. The first part is: *I beseech you*; the second is: *Be not conformed*;

the third is: *For I say, by the grace*.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(Of the twelve years of the virtues, and of the parents of the just man, namely hope and fear: *When Jesus was twelve years old*.)**

3. Let us say, then: *When Jesus was twelve years old*.

Let us see what is the moral significance of Jesus, his parents, Jerusalem, and the custom of the feast.

The two words ‘child Jesus’ express the perfection of the just man, who ought to be child-like and innocent as to himself, and Jesus (saviour) to his neighbour. Regarding innocence, six things are needful: cleanness of heart and bodily chastity; patience in adversity, so as not to be cast down, and constancy in prosperity, so as not to be puffed up; and, in order to persevere in these, humility and poverty. To be a saviour, likewise, six things are necessary: I was hungry, and you fed me, etc. [Mt 25.35]. Here we have the number twelve, the age of the just man who wishes to go up to Jerusalem with the child Jesus, of whom it is said: *When Jesus was twelve years old*.

There follows: *They went up*. The parents of Jesus are Joseph (‘increase’) and Mary (‘bitter sea’). She is given the name of bitterness, not because the bitter groaning of penance was hers, but as a kind of fore-telling of her Son’s Passion. These two stand for hope and fear, which are as it were the parents of the just man. Hope is the expectation of future good, giving rise to an affection of humility and the conscientious obedience of service. Behold Joseph, that humble and careful servant! Hope is as it were the foot on which we go forward and ‘increase’. Its opposite is despair, which has no capacity for advance, because whoever loves sin cannot hope for future glory. And so that hope may not be corrupted by presumption, it should be joined to fear, which is the beginning of wisdom [cf. Ps 110.10; Eccles 1.16]. No-one can attain the sweet taste of wisdom without first tasting the bitterness of fear. Thus we read in Exodus that the children of Israel, before tasting the sweetness of the manna, encountered the bitter waters of Mara. It is by the draught mingled with bitterness that one attains the joy of health.

**(For contemplatives: *The gates of Jerusalem*.)**

With these parents the just man should go up to Jerusalem, which represents excellence of life, tranquillity of mind and sweetness of contemplation. Tobias says:

*The gates of Jerusalem shall be built of sapphire, and of emerald;*

*and all the walls thereof shall be built of precious stones.*

*All its streets shall be paved with white and clean stones;*

*and Alleluia shall be sung in its streets*. [Tob 13.21-22]

Sky-blue sapphire and green emerald stand for the excellence of life which consists in contempt for earthly and desire for heavenly things. The precious, clean and white stones stand for tranquillity of mind. Alleluia stands for the sweetness of contemplation. See above in the third Sunday of September, and you will find this text more fully explained in the story of Tobias.

**(On the three-fold state of penitents: *Three times in the year*; and of their triple offering*: I beseech you*.)**

4. There follows: *According to the custom of the feast*.

In Deuteronomy, Moses commanded the children of Israel:

*Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose: in the feast of unleavened bread (the Passover), in the feast of weeks, and in that of tabernacles. No-one shall appear with his hands empty before the Lord, but everyone shall offer according to what he hath, according to the blessing of the Lord his God, which he shall give him*. [Dt 16.16-17]

Note that these three solemnities stand for the three states of beginners, proficients and perfect. The feast of unleavened bread represents the state of beginners, who should celebrate the Passover in *the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth* [cf. 1Cor 5.8], and *eat the Lamb with wild lettuce* [cf. Ex 12.8], the bitterness of their sins. Regarding this, see the Gospel of the Resurrection. The feast of weeks, marked by the offering of two new loaves from the first fruits to the Lord, represents the state of proficients whose *inner man is renewed from day to day* [cf. 2Cor 4.16], who offer the Lord the new loaves of purity in mind and body. The feast of tabernacles, or ‘tent-dwelling’, represents the state of the perfect, who as Isaiah says, sit in the tabernacles of confidence [Is 32.18]. Balaam, in the book of Numbers, spoke of these tents as *beautiful as woody valleys* [Num 24.5-6], the humility of poverty which offers shade from the heat of temporal things; and *as watered gardens near the rivers*, the infusion of grace which cools the thirst of carnal concupiscence.

This, then, is the custom of the feast, according to which every just man is obliged to go up to Jerusalem, where, lest he should appear empty handed before the Lord, he should offer the lamb of innocence on behalf of his neighbour, and the two new loaves of double continence for himself; and (as Leviticus says) he should *take the fruits of the fairest tree, and the branches of palm-trees*, etc. [cf. Lev 23.40]. See the final clause of the Gospel for Palm Sunday.

5. The first part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this first clause:

*I beseech you, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service*. [Rom 12.1]

Any just man who wants to go up to Jerusalem with his parents, according to the custom of the feast, must observe the three things the Apostle here refers to; otherwise he will appear empty-handed before the Lord, who says in Leviticus:

*Whatsoever sacrifice thou offerest, thou shalt season it with salt;*

*neither shalt thou take away the salt of the covenant of thy God from thy sacrifice.*

*In all thy oblations* (good works) *thou shalt offer salt* (discretion). [Lev 2.13]

*I beseech you, then, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice*. Note the three terms: 'living', 'holy' and 'pleasing to God'. Beginners should present their bodies as a living sacrifice, proficients as a holy one, the perfect as one pleasing to God. There is a **concordance** to this in Leviticus, where three kinds of offering are mentioned. The first was of sheep; the second of birds; the third of flour mixed with oil- and this in three ways: from the oven, the frying pan and the grill.

Beginners offer the first sort; as it is said:

*And when they have flayed the victim, they shall cut the joints into pieces; and shall put fire on the altar, having before laid in order a pile of wood. And they shall lay the parts that are cut out in order thereupon: to whit, the head, and all things that cleave to the liver; the entrails and feet being washed with water. And the priest shall burn them on the altar for a holocaust, and a sweet savour to the Lord*. [Lev 1.6-9]

The altar is the heart, the fire divine love, the pile of wood the totality of Christ's sufferings, the flaying stripping of guilt, the cut joints and limbs the circumstances mentioned in confession, the head the origin of sin, the liver its persistent love, the entrails unclean thoughts, the feet actions, the water shedding of tears.

The converted sinner, who is beginning to be penitent, should first lay upon the altar of his heart the combined sufferings of Christ: scourgings, blows, spittle, cross, nails and spear- and then in confession he should lay bare his guilt, even to the least detail, its origin and to what extent he loved and delighted in it. He should wash the uncleanness of his thoughts and deeds with the water of tears. If all these things are laid in order upon all the sufferings of Christ Jesus, he himself, the high priest, will set the fire of his love to it, which will consume all sins and make the penitent himself a sacrifice, wholly consumed, keeping nothing to himself, but subjecting himself entirely to the Lord's service, that he may be *a good odour of Christ in every place* [cf. 2Cor 2.15]. Thus he will present his body as a living sacrifice; a sacrifice, because it is dead to sin; living,

because it is alive to justice. So the Apostle says:

*I live, yet not I; but Christ lives in me*. [Gal 2.20]

6. There follows: *Holy*. Proficients offer the second sacrifice, spoken of in the same part of Leviticus:

*If the oblation of a holocaust to the Lord be of birds, of turtle-doves or of young pigeons: the priest shall offer it at the altar, and twisting back the neck and breaking the place of the wound, he shall make the blood run down upon the brim of the altar. But the crop of the throat and the feathers he shall cast beside the altar at the east side, in the place where the ashes are wont to be poured out, and he shall break the pinions thereof, and shall not cut nor divide it with a knife; and shall burn it on the altar, putting fire under the wood. It is a holocaust and oblation of most sweet savour to the Lord*. [Lev 1.14-17]

The burnt-offering is made of birds when the just man, winged with virtues (which are represented by the turtle-dove and the pigeon, because of their chastity, their simplicity and their plaintive cry), advances from virtue to virtue. He twists back the neck, beak to wings, when he practices in his works what he preaches with his mouth. Such twisting causes breaking: devotion of the mind leads to the shedding of tears which (as Augustine[1] says) are "the tears of the soul".

*Upon the brim of the altar*, which is the heart of the listener. The sweet harmony of voice in word and deed in the preacher stirs up devotion which penetrates the heart of the hearer. *Hinder not the music*, says Ecclesiasticus [32.5].

The ‘crop of the throat’ is burning avarice; the ‘feathers’ are pride that lifts up. The just man casts them from him at the east side, in the place of ashes, when he considers from what blissful glory he has fallen, due to the avarice and pride of the first parents to whom was said: *Ashes thou art* [cf. Gen 3.19].

He breaks the pinions when he considers the humility of the Lord’s Passion and divests himself of his own virtues; as Ezekiel says:

*When the voice came from above the firmament,*

*the living creatures let down their wings*. [Ezek 1.25]

The firmament is Christ, and the ‘voice above him’ cried:

*I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered*. [cf. Mt 26.31]

When the living creatures (the saints) hear these words, they lower their own virtues, not trusting in themselves but in the Passion of the stricken Shepherd. The just man, who

advances daily towards what is better, breaks the pinions of his virtues in humility, not cutting them off from himself in time of adversity, with the knife of impatience. So he offers himself as a holy victim on the altar, which is the imitation of the Lord's Passion, setting the fire of holy devotion to the wood of the holy fathers' examples. Thus the whole burnt-offering is made a sweet smelling oblation to the Lord.

7. There follows: *Pleasing to God*. Perfect men offer the third sacrifice, which (according to the same passage of Leviticus) consists in flour mixed with oil. Flour, made from the most refined and white grain, stands for the life of the perfect man; free from the bran of worldly vanity, and white with the cleanness of chastity. It is mixed with the oil of piety. This is then baked in the oven of poverty, fried in the pan of others' needs and weaknesses, and grilled on the grid of the Lord's Passion. Truly, truly this is a sacrifice pleasing to God!

These three make a 'reasonable offering', sincere with discretion and full of holiness.

Let us the, dear brothers, ask Jesus Christ, who went up to Jerusalem with his parents, to make us go up to the moral Jerusalem with hope and fear, and in the twelve virtues referred to; so that we may offer him at the triple festival a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. May he grant this, who is blessed in the heavenly Jerusalem. Alleluia, Amen, Alleluia.

**(On the second clause. The theme for a sermon on compassion for one's neighbour: *The vision was*.)**

8. There follows, secondly: *And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions*. [Lk 2.46]

Let us see what is meant by the three days, the temple, Jesus's sitting, the doctors, and his hearing and asking questions.

The three days represent understanding one's own wickedness, compassion for one's brother's need, and consideration and admiration of the divine pity. The first is in the prophet Micah:

*When I sit in darkness, the Lord is my light*. [Mic 7.8]

The second is in Ezekiel:

*This was the vision running to and fro in the midst of the living creatures,*

*a bright fire and lightning going forth from the fire*. [Ezek 1.13]

The bright fire is the compassion of charity, which burns and enlightens, from which goes forth the lightning of wonderful works. This vision, which truly confers sight, must run to and fro in the midst of the living creatures, Christians. ‘Running to and fro’ is an appropriate term, since it runs in all sorts of ways. For true compassion, it is not enough to provide only for corporal needs, without providing for the soul too, and vice versa. If anyone is weak in body, it feels weak too; and if anyone is hurt in soul, it burns as well [cf. 2Cor 11.29]. The third is in Ecclesiastes:

*The light is sweet; and it is delightful for the eyes to see the sun*. [Eccles 11.7]

The reference is to the eyes of the soul gazing on the brightness of divine piety. Whoever completes these three days will be able to find Jesus in the temple.

The temple was a spacious, roofed building (*tectum amplum*), and represents the mind of the just man, which spreads its shelter over the neighbour’s needs, and is wide in the knowledge of self and of God. In such a temple, after such a three days, Jesus is found. And what is he doing there? Three things. He sits in the midst of the doctors; he listens; and he asks questions. In the mind of the just man there are ‘doctors’, namely the dispositions of reason which teach what is to be avoided and what done. Jesus ‘sits in their midst’ when he calms the mind and, when it is calm, rests in it. He rests and *orders all things sweetly* [Wisd 8.1]. This is what Job says:

*When I sat as a king, with his army standing about him,*

*yet was I a comforter of them that mourned*. [Job 29.25]

This is the comfort: he hears and asks questions. When the mind is in silence and rest, then Jesus hears the affections of the heart speaking in his ear, and he questions them with the whip of kindly correction. Job says this:

*Thou visitest him early in the morning* (that is hearing)

*and thou provest him suddenly* (that is questioning). [Job 7.18]

This is the comforting of the mourners, those who ‘sigh for the waters above’ [Jos 15.18-19] in this vale of tears, that the blessed Jesus may hear and question them, visit and prove them:

*This may be my comfort, that afflicting me with sorrow, he spare me not*. [Job 6.10]

**(On the three days of penitents: *A journey of three days*.)**

9. This may be given another interpretation. The three days stand for penitence, which consists in the three elements of contrition, confession and satisfaction. Moses said in

Exodus:

*We will go three days journey into the wilderness, to sacrifice unto the Lord our God*. [Ex 3.18]

After these thee days, Joseph and Mary (the penitent in spirit, poor and humble) find Jesus in the temple of the heavenly Jerusalem; which is foreshadowed in Genesis, where we are told that after three days *the butler was restored to his former place* [cf. Gen 40.20-21].

*Sitting in the midst of the doctors*. This is what John says in the Apocalypse:

*I looked... and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and upon the throne one sitting,...*

*and round about the throne were four and twenty seats,*

*and upon the seats four and twenty ancients sitting,* (this denotes the twelve patriarchs and the twelve Apostles)

*clothed in white garments, and on their heads were crowns of gold*. [Apoc 4.1,2-4]

This is almost exactly what we sing in the Introit of today's Mass:

*On a throne exalted I beheld, and lo! a man sitting, whom a legion of angels worship,*

*singing together: Behold, his rule and governance endureth to all ages*.

And so the text continues:

*And the four and twenty fell down before him that sitteth on the throne,*

*and adored him that liveth for ever and ever. Amen*. [Apoc 4.10]

And they sing a new song:

*Thou art worthy, O Lord*, etc. [Apoc 4.11]

There follows: *Hearing and asking them questions*. The Lord hears the blessed spirits when he freely receives the offering of our worship through their ministry. Whence in the Apocalypse it says:

*The smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended up before God from the*

*hand of the angel*. [Apoc 8.4]

And Raphael said to Tobias:

*I offered thy prayer to the Lord*. [Tob 12.12]

The Apostle says:

*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?* [Heb 1.14]

He asks, when he reveals to them the secret of his will.

10. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause:

*Be not conformed to this world*. [Rom 12.2]

The Lord says in Isaiah:

*Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire*

*and bringeth forth an instrument for his work*. [Is 54.16]

The ‘smith’ is the devil, whom the Lord created according to his substance. With the breath of evil temptation he blows upon the coals in the fire, the impulses of sin. This world is like the Babylonian furnace, of which Daniel says:

*The furnace was heated exceedingly*. [Dan 3.22]

(See above in the story of Daniel, on the second Sunday of November [Pentecost XXII]) This furnace is so heated by the breath of the devil that iron (the proud), lead (the avaricious) and tin (the lustful) melt. Then the devil shapes them and produces ‘an instrument for his work’, that is, to do his will. One takes the shape of pride, another that of avarice, another that of lust. These are the vessels of wrath and shame, which are cast onto the dunghill of eternal damnation. Do you, then, who with Mary and Joseph seek Jesus and desire to find him, *be not conformed to this world: but be reformed in the newness of your mind* [Rom 12.2]. This is what Isaiah means by:

*There will be five cities in the land of Egypt*, etc. [Is 19.18]

(See above in the moral part of the sermon: *When a strong man armed*... [Lent III])

*That you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God*.

[Rom 12.2]

This is the three days, after which Jesus is found in the temple. The will of God is 'good' in contrition of heart, 'acceptable' in confession, and 'perfect' in satisfaction. Of the first, the Psalm says:

*Deal favourably, in thy goodwill with Sion*, etc. [Ps 50.20]

and in the book of Wisdom:

*O how good and sweet is thy spirit, O Lord, in all things!* [Wisd 12.1]

Of the second, Daniel says:

*So let our sacrifice* (our confession) *be made in thy sight this day that it may please thee* [Dan 3.40]

So Genesis says:

*The Lord had respect to Abel, and to his offerings*. [Gen 4.4]

Of the third, the Psalm says:

*Perfect thou my goings in thy paths*- [Ps 16.5]

which means in austerity of life and harshness of satisfaction.

Let us then ask the Lord Jesus Christ so to enable us to pass through these three days, that we may be found worthy to find him in the heavenly temple, sitting in the midst of the angels; who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

**(On the third clause. The theme for a sermon on humility and obedience: *My beloved went down into his garden*; and: *The almond tree shall flourish*; and: *He was subject to them.)***

11. There follows, thirdly: *And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them*. [Lk 2.51]

Note these three words: 'went down', 'Nazareth' and 'subject'. *Come down, sit in the dust, O daughter of Sion* [Is 47.1], because the Son of God went down. Unbending pride, which would seek to ascend above the height of the clouds, and *exalt your throne above the stars of heaven*, and sit upon the mountain of the covenant [cf. Is 14.13-14]- go down, I pray, because Jesus went down. And you, Capharnaum, lifted up to heaven

before you be plunged into hell [cf. Mt 11.23], go down with Jesus, who is paradise, as it is said: *His fruits are paradise* [Cant 4.15]. You harlot, sitting upon the scarlet beast, full of names of blasphemy [Apoc 17.3], go down with Jesus. Blush, blush now, unprofitable pride! Kneel, swollen arrogance, for the Wisdom of God goes down. Wretched man, crawling on hands and knees, tries to rise to a place of honour (which is really his dishonour); while blessed Jesus, at his loving mother's rebuke: *Son, why hast thou so done to us?* [Lk 2.48], deferred until the age of thirty the business he had begun at the age of twelve, and went down from the temple where he had sat in the midst of the doctors.

12. There follows: *And he came to Nazareth*. This is what the Bride says in the Canticles:

*My Beloved is gone down into his garden, to the bed of aromatical spices;* [Cant 6.1]

that is to say, to humility, the root of all other virtues. Our intention had been to pass through this place briefly, but the charm of Nazareth will not allow us to do so. The beauty of the place, the gracefulness of the flowers, the sweetness of the scents all hinder and detain us as we hasten to the wedding that is to be celebrated at Cana of Galilee.

Nazareth, that humble place, means 'a flower'; and it represents humility, which may be well compared to a flower, which has these three characteristics: beauty of colour, sweetness of scent, and hope of fruit. Likewise, in true humility there is beauty of honour; as it is said:

*My flowers are the fruit of honour and riches*. [Ecclus 24.23]

It has also sweetness of good repute. Just as a flower is not spoiled when it sends forth its scent, so the truly humble person is not conceited when he is praised for the fragrance of a good life. As St Bernard[2] says, "The truly humble man wants to be held in low esteem; whereas whoever is not humble wants to be well spoken-of." So Solomon says:

*The almond tree shall flourish, the locust shall be made fat,*

*and the caper tree shall be destroyed*. [Eccles 12.5]

The almond tree, which blossoms before the other trees, is the humble man, who says with David:

*I will play before the Lord, and make myself meaner than I have done;*

*and I will be little in my own eyes*. [2Kg(Sm) 6.22]

The Wisdom of the Father says of this play:

*I was delighted every day, playing before him at all times, playing in the world:*

*and my delights were to be with the children of men*. [Prov 8.30-31]

The Son, blessed Jesus, played before his Father when he was betrayed by his disciple; when he was bound to the pillar and flogged; when Herod mocked him; when he was crowned with thorns, struck and beaten, spat on, blindfolded, hit on the head with a reed; and when his beard was plucked. He played even when he went out, carrying his Cross, to the place called Golgotha [cf. Jn 19.17], where he was crucified by the soldiers, derided by the leaders, given gall and vinegar to drink, and pierced in the side by a spear. See how the Wisdom of God played and was made mean upon the earth! see how his delights were with the children of men! He adapted himself to this play so as to be truly humble; and however lowly he might seem to himself, he was all the more exalted in God's sight.

So *the almond tree will flower and the locus will become fat*. When humility flourishes in the mind, and decency in deeds, then *the locust will be fat*- meaning the soul of the humble man, which leaps in contemplation. It will not be fat like the hypocrite, with the smell of self-praise; but with the flower of true humility. It will derive its richness from its own intrinsic bloom, not from what anyone else says; and *the caper tree* of pride and vain-glory *will be destroyed*.

The hope of receiving fruit comes from the riches of the Lord's house. When I see the flower, I expect fruit; so, when I see a really humble person, I have hope that he will be blessed in heaven. But alas! As Isaiah says:

*Every one is a hypocrite and wicked*. [Is 9.17]

And Micah:

*He that is best among them is as a briar*:

*and he that is righteous, as the thorn of the hedge*. [Mic 7.4]

Indeed, today everyone is a hypocrite, a briar and a thorn. The hypocrite pretends to be what he is not: a briar, smooth in words but piercing in deeds; a thorn wounding passers by to draw the blood of praise and money. In the garden of Nazareth there is no briar or thorn: only the lily and the violet. And so *Jesus came to Nazareth*.

13. There follows: *And he was subject to them*. At the words, *He was subject to them*, all pride dissolves, all stubbornness melts away, all disobedience humbles itself. Who was subject? He who by his word alone created all things from nothing; as Isaiah says:

*Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,*

*and weighed the heavens with his palm,*

*who hath poised with three fingers the bulk of the earth,*

*and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance*. [is 40.12]

As Job says;

*He shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble.*

*He commandeth the sun and it riseth not: and shutteth up the stars as it were under a seal.*

*He alone spreadeth out the heavens: and walketh upon the waves of the sea.*

*He maketh Arcturus, and Orion, and Hyades, and the inner parts of the south.*

*He doth things great and incomprehensible and wonderful: of which there is no number*.

*Who can make the harmony of heaven to sleep*. [Job 9.6-10; 38.37]

*Who will take and draw out Leviathan with a hook, and will tie his tongue with a cord,*

*and put a ring in his nose, and bore through his jaw with a buckle*. [Job 40.19-21]

Such and so great a one was subject to them.

Subject to whom? To a carpenter and a poor virgin. The First and the Last, the Lord of angels: subject to men! The Creator of heaven subject to a carpenter! The God of eternal glory to a poor and lowly virgin! Whoever heard anything like it? Whoever has seen anything like it? Let no philosopher, then, disdain to obey and be subject to a fisherman; no wise man to a simple, no educated man to an uneducated, no prince's son to someone of lowly birth.

14. The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this third clause:

*For I say, by the grace that is given me, to all that are among you* (philosophers, wise men, educated, nobly born- and to all people like that),

*not to be more wise than it behoveth to be wise*. [Rom 12.3]

As he says elsewhere: *Be not high-minded, but fear* [Rom 11.20]. "There is much lacking to you, as far as wisdom is concerned, if you are not wise about yourself."[3] You are not wise if you are ‘too clever by half’. To be truly wise is to go down, to come to Nazareth, to be subject and to obey perfectly. This should be the sum of your wisdom, which is *to be wise unto sobriety* [Rom 12.3]. To be over-clever may be intoxicating, but therein real wisdom loses its tang. To try to be too clever is the mistake of "a beast with understanding, a novice being prudent, a beginner being wise"- like a drunkard wandering and throwing up! St Bernard[4] says, "Perfect obedience is greatest in the beginner who lacks experience. He does not understand why something is commanded, but this leads him simply to do what his superior tells him, humbly and faithfully. This is the only judgement he can make, to make no personal judgement about it. This is all his wisdom, that in this regard he has none." This is *being wise unto sobriety*. Pure simplicity is like *the waters of Siloe, that go with silence* [Is 8.6]. It makes the soul sober. It is as if the wine of worldly wisdom were turned to water, and the worldly-wise become wise unto sobriety. If those in religion are truly wise, God will gather them by means of the simple. He chose the foolish, the weak, the base and the contemptible, so that by means of them he might gather the wise, the strong and the noble: *so that no flesh might glory in itself* [cf. 1Cor 1.27-29], but in him who went down and came to Nazareth and was subject to them. To him be honour and glory for ever and ever. Let every simple and obedient soul say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

1. AUGUSTINE, *De diversis, sermo* 357,4,7; PL 39.1542

2. BERNARD, *In Cantica sermo* 16.10; PL 183.853

3. BERNARD, *De consideratione* II,3,6; PL 182.745

4. GUIGO THE CARTHUSIAN, *Epistola ad fratres* I,5,14; PL 184.317. The preceding words are also from the same place.

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost: *As Jesus was going to Jerusalem*, which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon on the infusion of grace: *My root is opened*.)**

1. At that time: *As Jesus was going to Jerusalem, he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee* etc. [Lk 7.11]

Job says:

*My root is opened beside the waters: and dew shall continue in my harvest.* [Job 29.19]

Note these four words: root, waters, dew and harvest. The 'root' denotes the thought of a pure mind; the 'waters' are the infusion of grace; the 'dew' is the blessedness of glory; and the 'harvest' is the separation of soul and body. So when the thought of a pure mind is opened by devotion, the water of heavenly grace is infused; as in the Apocalypse:

*I stand at the gate and knock; if any man shall hear my voice and open to me the door* (the 'opened root') *I will come in to him* ('beside the waters'). [cf. Apoc 3.20]

And in Canticles, the bridegroom says to the bride [Cant 5.2]:

*Open to me, my sister.... for my head is full of dew, and my locks of the drops of the night*.

It is as if he would say, O soul, if you will open to me the root of your mind, I will pour into you from the head of my divinity the dew and drops of heavenly grace, which will refresh you in the night of tribulation. The word 'drops' is apt, for in this present life grace is but a drop, compared with the eternal reward. There is a drop that stays, and one that merely falls; he who receives grace and does not lose it, has a drop that sticks to him; but he *who believes for a while and in time of trouble falls away* [cf. Lk 8.13] has only a drop that passes away.

There is a **concordance** to this in the same book of Job:

*A tree hath hope. If it be cut, it groweth green again, and the boughs thereof sprout.*

*If its root be old in the earth, and its stock be dead in the dust:*

*at the scent of water, it shall spring,*

*and bring forth leaves, as when it was first planted*. [Job 14.7-9]

When wood is burned, it is changed into light. It represents the just man who, when ablaze with the fire of love, becomes the light of good example. Should he be cut down by the axe of mortal sin, he should not despair of God's mercy, which is greater than his weakness. He should have hope, because by repentance he will grow green again, and his branches (his works) will bear fruit. If his root (the inclination of his heart) be old in the earth (earthly things), and his stock (his works) be dead in the dust (worldly vanity), yet if he turns again to God, to the scent of that water which is the grace of the Holy Spirit, he will spring up in confession, and put forth leaves in works of satisfaction. How apt the words, then, *My root is opened beside the waters*.

The text continues: *and dew shall continue in my harvest*. The harvest is reaped when souls are finally taken out of their bodies, like mature crops cut from the ground, and are transferred to the heavenly barns. The dew then continues in the harvest, because the sweetness of the eternal vision satisfies the souls of the elect. To receive the sweetness of this dew, we must pass through the midst of Samaria and Galilee, and go with Jesus Christ: as in today's Gospel, *As Jesus was going to Jerusalem*.

2. There are three things to note in today's Gospel. First, the passage of Jesus Christ through Samaria and Galilee to Jerusalem, beginning: *As he was going*. Second, the cleansing of the lepers: *And as he entered a certain town*. Third, the return of the foreigner to glorify God: *And one of them*.

The Introit sung in today's Mass is: *Incline thy ear, O Lord, and hear me*. The Epistle is from St Paul to the Galatians, and we will divide it into three parts, **concordant** with those of the Gospel: First, *Walk in the Spirit*; second, *The works of the flesh are manifest*; third, *The fruit of the Spirit is charity*. The reason for reading this Epistle with this Gospel is that the Gospel tells of the lepers and their cleansing, while the Epistle mentions the vices from which the leprosy of sin arise in the soul, and the virtues whereby the soul is cleansed from this leprosy.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(The building which is a heavenly way of life: *If thou wilt return to the Almighty*.)**

3. Let us say, then:

*As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee*.

All the words in this section are worth noting. Whoever wants to go to Jerusalem, must first pass through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 'Samaria' means 'guard', Galilee' means 'passing through', and Jerusalem means 'vision of peace'. Whoever keeps the commandments passes through them to the virtues, and so is able to reach Jerusalem. Blessed Job 'passed through Samaria' when he said:

*If I have walked in vanity,*

*and my foot hath made haste to deceit:*

*Let him weigh me in a just balance,*

*and let God know my simplicity.* [Job 31.5-6]

'Let God know' means, rather: 'Let God make us to know'. By the 'balance', he refers to the Mediator between God and man, who weighs our merits with a fair scale, and in whose precepts we acknowledge what is lacking in our life. The sense, then, is that if ever I have done anything thoughtlessly or deliberately harmful, let the Mediator appear, so that I may see in his life whether I have been really sincere. Job also 'passed through the midst of Galilee', when he said:

*Let he himself that judgeth write a book,*

*that I may carry it on my shoulder,*

*and put it about me as a crown.*

*At every step of mine I would pronounce it,*

*and offer it as to a prince*. [Job 31.35-37]

*Neither doth the Father judge any man, but hath given all judgement to the Son* [Jn 5.22]. When he came for our redemption, he established the New Testament for us. In the future, he will be the author of our judgement, who is now the author of the book. He will make a strict reckoning, who now bids us meekly. To carry the book on our shoulder is to fulfil Holy Scripture by our deeds. First, we are told to carry it on our shoulder; then, to put it about us as a crown. The repetition indicates that if we bear well the commandments of the sacred word on our shoulder, they will show us hereafter the crown of victory as our reward. At every step of mine- each step is an increase in virtue,

and we go up by them in order to gain possession of what is heavenly. To ‘pronounce’ the book at every step is to show that one has taken in its teaching, not just by word but by deed. To ‘offer it as to a prince’ means that, as we offer by holding out in our hand, so we offer the book to the coming Judge by holding to the words of his commandments in our action.

4. There is a **concordance** in Job to these three words, Samaria, Galilee and Jerusalem, where Eliphaz the Themanite says:

*If thou wilt return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up,*

*and shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacle,*

*He shall give for earth flint, and for flint torrents of gold.*

*And the Almighty shall be against thy enemies:*

*and silver shall be heaped together for thee.*

*Then thou shalt abound in delight in the Almighty:*

*and shalt lift up thy face to God.*

*Thou shalt pray to him, and he will hear thee:*

*and thou shalt pay vows.*

*Thou shalt decree a thing, and it shall come to thee:*

*and light shall shine in thy ways*. [Job 22.23-28]

*If thou wilt return*: O sinner, if you will return from yourself, in which is ruin, to God who rebuilds, you will indeed by built up again. First demolish what you have built in yourself, and he will build his own house upon you. So he says in Isaiah:

*I who say to the deep: Be thou desolate,*

*and I will dry up thy rivers.*

*Who say to Jerusalem: Thou shalt be built;*

*and to the temple: Thy foundations shall be laid*. [Is 44.27-28]

The deep, whose bottom is far below, is the abyss of evil thoughts that must be abandoned; the rivers of concupiscence which flow through the channels of the five senses must be dried up; and then the temple of the mind will be founded upon sapphires, as Isaiah says:

*I will lay thy foundation with sapphires*, [Is 54.11]

the longings for eternal life; and Jerusalem, the heavenly way of life, will be built with its bulwarks; as Isaiah says:

*I will make thy bulwarks of jasper, and thy gates of graven stones*. [Is 54.12]

Jasper is green, and it is said to put phantoms to flight. It represents poverty, which keeps men in the greenness of faith, and puts riches to flight, those illusions which deceive men. Faith despises temporal things, and those who love faith shun them. If the building of our way of life is built with bulwarks of poverty, the arrows of the old enemy need not be feared. The gates are the five bodily senses, which the Lord makes of graven stones, when our eyes are shaped to the shedding of tears, our tongue to self-accusation, our ears to preaching, our hands to the bestowal of alms and our feet to visiting the sick. The Lord says of this carving in Zechariah:

*Behold, I will grave the graving thereof,*

*and I will take away the iniquity of that land in one day*. [Zech 3.9]

The word used suggests the work of a sculptor with his chisel. When the Lord engraves this carving on the gates of the senses, he takes away the iniquity of the land, our body. He does this ‘in one day’, by the unifying enlightenment which makes a man’s outward demeanour one with his inner nature, in the service of God. So the words are apt, *If thou wilt return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, and shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacle*. The body is the soul’s tabernacle, and the mind is that of the thoughts. The sense is, if you return to God you will be cleansed in thought and deed.

**(Against religious and clergy: *The land, out of which bread grew*.)**

5. *He shall give for earth flint, and for flint torrents of gold*. See here Samaria, Galilee and Jerusalem: guarding, passing, vision of peace. The earth, because of its stability, stands for keeping the commandments, of which Job says:

*The land, out of which bread grew, in its place hath been overturned with fire.*

*The stones of it are the place of sapphires, and the clods of it are gold*. [Job 28.5-6]

The land is the keeping of the commandments, from which grows the bread of heavenly

refreshment. If you keep the commandments, you will be refreshed with the bread of heavenly sweetness. So the Lord, in Isaiah, promises to whoever does his will, not his own:

*While thou dost not thy own ways, and thy own will is not found,*

*then thou shalt be delighted in the Lord,*

*and I will lift thee up above the high places of the earth,*

*and will feed thee with the inheritance of Jacob thy father:*

*for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.* [Is 58.13-14]

Our wretched pleasure follows a two-fold path of evil will and deed. If this pleasure ceases, you will be delighted in the Lord:

*Delight in the Lord; and he will give thee the requests of thy heart*. [Ps 36.4]

Then he will lift you up above the high places of the earth, so that you will despise temporal things, subdue your flesh and keep the commandments. Then he will feed you with the inheritance of your father, Jacob. The inheritance of ‘Jacob our father’ (Jesus Christ), which he left us, is poverty and humility, obedience, and the pains of his Passion. We are fed with them when we embrace them with heart-felt delight. Moses says in Deuteronomy:

*They shall suck as milk the abundance of the sea*. [Dt 33.19]

Just as a child sucks milk from its mother’s breast with eagerness and delight, so we should suck the abundance of ‘the sea’, the pains of the Passion, from the life of Jesus Christ. Note the word ‘suck’. We only suck by compressing our lips. If we do not compress our lips from love of temporal things, we cannot suck the pains of Christ’s Passion. So we say, *The land, out of which bread grew*.

*In its place hath been overturned with fire*. The ‘place’ of the Lord’s commandment is the Church’s prelates, clergy and religious, in whom it should have a special place. But alas! The Lord’s commandments are overturned in their own place, clergy and religious, with the fire of lust and avarice. Charity, chastity, humility and poverty, which are the spiritual precepts of the Lord, are overturned in clergy and religious. They are envious, lustful, proud and avaricious.

*The stones of it are the place of sapphires*. Sapphires are sky-blue in colour. Prelates, clergy and religious used to be sapphire stones, with a loving desire for heavenly things; now they are more like dung, filthy with sin.

*And the clods of it are gold*. The clods turned by the rustic ploughman are composed of moisture and dust. The pastors of the Church, and those who profess religious life, used to be 'clods of gold': 'clods', because they held their profession and their practice together with the moisture of grace; 'golden', because they shone in virtuous life and in wisdom. Now, as Jeremiah laments:

*The noble sons of Sion and they that were clothed with the best gold:*

*now are they esteemed as earthen vessels, the work of a potter's hands*. [Lam 4.2]

The devil has made them, from vessels of honour, to be earthen vessels held in contempt, to be thrown on the rubbish-heap of gehenna. But with these dismissed to the rubbish tip, let us return to our subject!

**(On constancy of mind: *He shall give for earth flint*.)**

6. *He shall give for earth flint*, as if to say: whoever keeps the commandments to the best of his ability will pass to an insuperable constancy in virtue. Flint is a hard stone, from which one can strike fire. it represents constancy in virtue, from which comes a fire to enlighten and kindle one's neighbour to divine love. Of this flint the Lord says in Ezekiel:

*I have made thy face like an adamant and like flint,*

*be thou not discouraged at their presence, for they are a provoking house*. [Ezek 3.9]

By adamant and flint, constancy is meant; which the Lord puts in the face of the preacher, so that he is not afraid in the presence of the sinner who provokes God himself. In Job, the Lord says of the preacher:

*He pranceth boldly; he goeth forward to meet armed men.*

*He despiseth fear; he turneth not his back to the sword*. [Job 39.21-22]

St Gregory[1] says that the preacher 'prances boldly', because he is not broken by those against him; and he 'goes forward to meet armed men' when to defend justice he opposes himself to those who are acting in a depraved and evil way. 'He despises fear', referring to the fear of punishment to come, and the sword that inflicts punishment in the present. Because he does not dread the coming judgement, he despises fear; because he is not overcome by present blows, he does not retreat from the sword in any way. Job further says of this flint:

*He hath stretched forth his hand to the flint:*

*he hath overcome mountains from the roots.*

*In the rocks he hath cut out rivers:*

*and his eye hath seen every precious thing*. [Job 28.9-10]

He stretches forth his hand to the flint when he applies his action to constancy in virtue; (as Proverbs says: *She hath put out her hand to strong things* [Prov 31.19]). In this way he overturns in himself mountains (pride of heart) from the roots (the inmost thoughts). He cuts rivers of compunction out of the rocks of his hard-heartedness. Then, with his mind's eye enlightened, he sees every precious thing, in comparison with which everything else seems vile. The is the precious thing of which is said, For flint, torrents of gold. Here is Jerusalem; here is every precious thing, which his eyes will see when he has first passed through Samaria and Galilee.

**(A theme for contemplatives, and on the nature of the eagle*: Will the eagle mount up at thy command?* and on the amethyst-stone.)**

7. There is a **concordance** to this in Job, where the Lord says to him:

*Will the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest in high places?*

*She abideth among the rocks, and dwelleth among cragged flints,*

*and stony hills where there is no access.*

*From thence she looketh for the prey,*

*and her eyes behold afar off.*[Job 39.27-29]

Proverbially, the eagle has keen eyesight- 'eagle-eyed', we say- and can gaze at the sun without flinching. Natural History teaches us that it has extremely keen sight, and makes its young look at the sun before their wings are fully-fledged. It strikes them, and turns them to face the sun; and if the eye of one chick should show a tear, it kills it and feeds the other. It is also said that it lays three eggs, but casts the third one out. If an eagle should be seen with three chicks, it throws one out of the nest to feed the others more strongly. It is also supposed to gather amethysts, those precious stones, into the nest with its chicks, so that snakes may be driven away from them by its power.

The eagle is a symbol of the saints' keen understanding, and their sublime contemplation, which directs their children (their works) towards the true sun and light of wisdom, so that any hidden impurity, or anything foreign to its nature, may be revealed in the sun's brightness. All iniquity is reproved by the light, and the works of darkness are made manifest by the light [cf. Eph 5.13]. If they see that any of their works cannot face

the sun aright, and are confounded by its rays and caused to weep: they kill them straightaway. The ray of grace shows who is a true child. The true work looks on the sun aright, and bears the heat of tribulation. It does not flinch. The impure work looks towards the earth, and faints in tribulation. It weeps for the loss of temporal things, and so should be killed, and good work fed from it. When you kill what is evil in yourself, you refresh what is good; what makes evil grow weak, makes good grow strong. Note also that the three eggs, or three chicks, of the eagle represent three loves of the just man: the love of God, the love of neighbour and the love of self. This last should be cast out entirely from the nest of his conscience. Self-love greatly hinders the love of God and of neighbour, and so it should be entirely cast out. Job drove this offspring from his nest, saying: *I tear my flesh with my teeth* [Job 13.14]. The teeth cut up food, and they represent the inner senses which question everything, and as it were chew over and break down what they consider, before passing it on to the belly of memory. If the saints' teeth apprehend anything carnal within them, they grind it up and spit it out from their consciousness.

8. Note, further, that the amethyst is the chief of precious stones, violet in colour, flickering with golden fire and emitting a purple radiance. It represents the life of Jesus Christ, which was violet in its poverty and humility; shone with golden fire in his preaching and miracles; and showed purple in his Passion. The just man ought to keep this amethyst in the nest of his conscience, to drive away the serpents of devilish temptation from his chicks, his works.

We may say of this eagle, then, *Will the eagle mount up at thy command?* St Gregory[2] says that the eagle mounts up when, submissive to the divine decrees, the life of the faithful hovers on high. He 'makes his nest in high places', because he does not let his mind dwell on matters low and base. He 'abides in the rocks' (in Holy Scripture, 'rock' in the singular means Christ; 'rocks', in the plural, the saints: so Peter says, *You are as living stones* [1Pt 2.5]). The eagle abides in the rocks, then, because it takes its stand on the sayings of the mighty fathers of old. The rocks can also be understood as the heavenly powers, because these are set in the desert like rocks, strangers to all change and changeability, not like trees. The holy man awaits the everlasting glory of the angels, and though a sojourner in this world he is already rooted in the heights he sees and desires. He 'dwells among cragged flints': what are these, but the mighty choirs of angels? They are 'riven', because part of them fell, and part stood firm. They remain integral in merit, but diminished in number. They are called 'stony hills without access', since the glory of the angels is inaccessible to the heart of sinful man; but anyone so rapt in contemplation as to set his mind amid the angelic choirs, will not be satisfied until he can see even him who is above all angels. From thence he 'looks for food'; that is, he directs his mind's eye from the angel choirs to the glory of the heavenly majesty. If he does not see it, he still hungers; if he does see it, he is satisfied. But because we cannot see God as he is while we are weighed down by the flesh, there is added, 'His eyes behold afar off', as though to say that however keenly the saints direct their gaze, they cannot as yet see any clearer that impenetrable brightness.

Blessed then is that eagle who dips her beak in the golden brook of the heavenly

Jerusalem, of which the psalmist says:

*They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house:*

*and thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure*. [Ps 35.9]

So Genesis says that Joseph's brothers *drank and were merry with him* [Gen 43.34]. One who is drunk is changed in mind and speech. The minds of the blessed, who are drunk with the golden torrent, are changed because their faith and hope are emptied, and the command to love the Lord God with the whole heart, etc. is fulfilled; which now is not fulfilled. Their speech is changed, too, as is said:

*Let my mouth not speak the works of man*. [Ps 16.4]

So let us say: *He shall give for earth flint, and for flint torrents of gold*. Here is shown that whoever wants to go to Jerusalem and drink of the golden torrent of heavenly bliss, must first pass through Samaria and Galilee, must possess earth and flint. And because there are enemies lying in wait for us as we come to Samaria and pass through it to Galilee- the evil spirits whom we must overcome by the grace of God, so as to reach Jerusalem- the text of Job continues*: The Almighty shall be against thy enemies, and silver shall be heaped together for thee*; as though to say: When he drives the evil spirits from you, he will burnish your conscience and you will abound in delight in the Almighty. To abound in the delights of the Almighty is to be satisfied with the banquet of love in that clear conscience. Proverbs says of this:

*A secure mind is like a continual feast.* [Prov 15.15]

*Thou shalt lift up thy face to God*; that is, you will raise up your heart to seek out the things above. *Thou shalt pray to him, and he will hear thee*.

So the just man says in the Introit of today's Mass:

*Incline thy ear, O Lord, and hear me*. [Ps 85.1]

*And thou shalt pay vows*. St Gregory[3] says that he who makes a vow, but is unable to fulfil it because of infirmity, is suffering a punishment for sin: when he wants to do good, he has lost the ability. But when the guilt that was hindering him has been cleansed, immediately the ability to fulfil the vow is restored. *Thou shalt decree a thing, and it shall come to thee*. Something decreed comes about when a virtue desired and sought is made effective and fruitful by God's gift. *And light shall shine in thy ways*. Light shines on the ways of the just when wonderful works of virtue shed their brightness all around.

9. The first part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this first clause:

*Walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh*. [Gal 5.16]

Whoever wants to go up to Jerusalem with Jesus must walk in the spirit, not in the flesh. He walks in the spirit when he passes through Samaria and Galilee; so the text says, walk in the spirit (if you want to go up to Jerusalem) and by so doing you will not fulfil in your action the lusts of the flesh, the pleasures that the flesh suggests.

*For the flesh lusteth against the spirit: and the spirit against the flesh*. [Gal 5.17]

Our flesh is dear to us, and instinctively seeks to procreate. Beloved flesh, yet lacking true love, and so lusting against the spirit! Beloved flesh, soon you will become hateful, decaying with worms, and foul! Flesh and spirit are opposed to one another, and so we cannot do the things we want to. There is a **concordance** to this in Job:

*The life of man upon earth is a warfare*. [Job 7.1]

Man's life is a warfare, a trial, because the flesh which is already corrupt begets trouble from itself, and it tries to stir up evil even in the good things it performs. It turns the repose of contemplation into sloth, and it turns abstinence into vainglory.

We beg you, then, Lord Jesus Christ, to make us pass through Samaria by keeping your commandments; and through Galilee by being constant in virtue. So may we reach Jerusalem and be found fit to drink of its golden torrent. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A theme for a sermon on the five kinds of leprosy and their meaning: *As he entered*.)**

10. There follows, secondly:

*And as he entered into a certain town, there met him ten men that were lepers, who stood afar off; and lifted up their voice, saying: Jesus, master, have mercy on us. Whom when he saw, he said: Go, show yourselves to the priests. And it came to pass, as they went, that they were made clean*. [Lk 17.12-14]

The allegorical meaning is plain. The town is the world, and as the Lord enters it, the lepers meet him, by whom we understand the human race, which had sinned against the ten commandments, having loved neither God nor neighbour. Covered with the leprosy of unfaithfulness and iniquity, humanity cried out: *Jesus, master*, etc. It called for salvation, it begged mercy upon the human race, and the Lord granted both. With the blood of redemption and the water of baptism he cleansed it of all the leprosy of infidelity and wickedness.

The moral interpretation is this. These ten lepers stand for all sinners, who are affected by five kinds of leprosy, in five places. Leviticus refers to the five kinds of leprosy, and the five places infected by it, to whit: white, shining, obscure, red and pale; leprosy in the head, the beard, the skin of the body, the clothes and the house.

*Whosoever shall be defiled with the leprosy, and is separated by the judgement of the priest: shall have his cloths hanging loose, his head bare, his mouth covered with a cloth: and he shall cry out that he is defiled and unclean. All the time that he is a leper and unclean, he shall dwell also alone without the camp*. [Lev 13.44-46]

Let us see what these words mean, and explain each one. The white leprosy is hypocrisy and pretence of religion; the shining is ambition for passing honour; the obscure is the uncleanness of fornication; the red is robbery and usury; and the pale is envy of another's happiness.

11. Of the leprosy of hypocrisy and pretence, Job says:

*Dissemblers and crafty men provoke God*. [Job 36.13]

By a 'dissembler', we understand someone who appears to be what he is not, a pretender. A hypocrite is like that, pretending to a holiness that is not his. He is shown honour, because he is thought to be godly, but as Job says:

*The congregation of the hypocrite is barren*, [Job 16.34]

because in the things he does he is not seeking the fruit of an eternal reward. He is sterile and dried up, because where a good intention is lacking, what appears to be good perishes. White leprosy infects everything that seems right in human eyes, yet is not done with a right intention.

**(Against glorying in dignity: *Shall not the light of the wicked*.)**

Of the 'shining leprosy' of transitory honour, Baldad the Suhite says in Job:

*Shall not the light of the wicked be extinguished,*

*and the flame of his fire not shine?*

*The light shall be dark in his tabernacle:*

*and the lamp that is over him shall be put out*. [Job 18.5-6]

The light of the wicked is extinguished, because the success of a fleeting lifetime ends

with it. The flame of his fire does not shine, the burning fire of temporal desire, whose flame is outward dignity and power, arising from its inward heat. It stops shining, because at death all outward show is taken away. The light is dark in his tabernacle, where 'light' means joy and 'darkness' grief. In the wicked man's tabernacle, light becomes dark because the joy in his heart that came from temporal things fails. The lamp that is over him is put out. We think of an earthenware lamp: a symbol of joy in the flesh. The lamp over him is put out, because when retribution for his evil deeds comes upon the wicked man, the joy of the flesh is driven from his mind. It says 'over', rather than 'in', him because earthly joys control the minds of the wicked.

**(Against lust: *The eye of the adulterer*.)**

Of the 'obscure leprosy' of fornication, Job says:

*The eye of the adulterer observeth darkness, saying:*

*No eye shall see me. And he will cover his face.*[Job 24.15]

An adulterer is someone who violates another's marriage-bed, by intimate union with that other man's wife. The uncleanness of fornication darkens the eye of reason, and always looks for the opportunity a dark place gives, to commit sin more safely without fear of being seen. So Ecclesiasticus says:

*To a man that is a fornicator all bread is sweet:*

*Every man that passeth his own bed, despising his own soul,*

*and saying: Who seeth me? Darkness compasseth me about,*

*and the walls cover me, and no man seeth me: who do I fear?*

*The Most High will not remember my sins.*

*And he understandeth not that his eye seeth all things*. [Ecclus 23.24-27]

He 'covers his face' so as not to be recognised. The 'face' of the human heart is its likeness to God; and the sinner covers it, so as not to be known by the strict judge, when he condemns his life for his evil deeds.

**(Against robbery: *Some have removed landmarks*.)**

Of the red leprosy of the rapacious, Job says:

*Some have removed landmarks, have taken away flocks by force.*

*They have driven away the ass of the fatherless,*

*and have taken away the widow's ox for a pledge.*

*They have overturned the way of the poor,*

*and have oppressed together the meek of the earth.* [Job 24.2-4]

Divine patience bore with them and waited for repentance, but they *only treasured up wrath for themselves in the day of wrath* [cf. Rom 2.5]. Of the outcome of their lives, Job says again:

*Why do the wicked live,*

*are they advanced, and strengthened with riches?*

*Their seed continueth before them:*

*a multitude of kinsmen, and of children's children in their sight.*

*Their houses are secure and peaceable:*

*and the rod of God is not upon them.*

*Their cattle have conceived and failed not,*

*their cow has calved and is not deprived of her fruit.*

*Their little ones go out like a flock:*

*and their children dance and play.*

*They take the timbrel and harp,*

*and rejoice at the sound of the organ.*

*They spend their days in wealth.*

*And in a moment they go down to hell,*

*who have said to God: Depart from us.*

*We desire not the knowledge of thy ways.*

*Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him?*

*And what doth it profit us if we pray to him?*

*Yet because their good things are not in their hand,*

*may the counsel of the wicked be far from me.*[Job 21.7-16]

**(Against envy: *The foolish man*.)**

Of the leprosy of envy, Job says:

*Anger indeed killeth the foolish:*

*and envy slayeth the little one*. [Job 5.2]

The 'little one' is whoever loves earthly things, the 'great' is he who loves the eternal; so envy kills the little one, because no-one dies from this plague except a person who desires earthly things. St Gregory[4] says that whoever wishes to be free from the plague of envy, should love that inheritance which is not lessened by the number of co-heirs. It is the same for all, and each one receives the whole of it.

**(The five places in which leprosy is found, and their meaning.)**

12. Leprosy in the head means impurity in thought; leprosy in the beard is wickedness in outward action; leprosy in the skin is degrading conversation; leprosy in the clothing is dissent from the faith of Christ, or imprudence in exercising virtue; leprosy in the house is discord in the community.

Of impurity of thought, Job says:

*He shall suck the head of asps: and the vipers tongue shall kill him*. [Job 20.16]

The asp, which is a small snake, represents the hidden tempting by the devil, and its head or beginning starts in the heart. If it is caught there, it can be pulled out only with violence. The viper is larger in body, and as it is born it goes forth with violence. The sinner 'sucks the asp's head', and the viper's tongue kills him, when he freely accepts hidden temptation at its beginning, and then lets himself be overcome by violent temptations.

Of the outward manifestation of wickedness, Job says:

*He hath stretched out his hand against God,*

*and hath strengthened himself against the Almighty.*

*He hath run against him with his neck raised up, and is armed with a fat neck.*

*Fatness hath covered his face, and the fat hangeth down on his sides*. [Job 16.25-27]

To stretch out one's hand against God is to persevere in wicked action in spite of his judgements. To be strengthened against the Almighty is to be allowed to prosper in one's evil actions. To run against him with neck raised up is to commit what displeases the Creator arrogantly. He 'runs', because he has no hindrance to his evil action. He is 'armed with a fat neck', pride in wealth, being upheld by affluence as though by much flesh. He covers his face with fatness- or rather, fatness covers his face- when desire for an abundance of earthly things squeezes his mental vision. Fat hangs down from his sides (the rich man's 'sides' being his hangers-on) because the hangers-on of a wicked but powerful person are also swollen and fattened with his power.

Of degraded conversation, the Lord says in Job:

*He shall strew gold under him like mire.*

*He shall make the deep sea to boil like a pot*. [Job 41.21-22]

Gold represents the brightness of holiness, mire the filth of carnal pleasures. There are many who seem to shine in Holy Church with the gleam of justice; but the devil subjects them with the contagion of wretched pleasures and the filth of degraded conversation: and so he 'strews gold under him like mire'. He also makes the 'deep sea', the sinner's heart, to boil like a pot by setting under it the fire of temptation; and so it boils over with the foam of filthy talk.

The clothing of Jesus Christ, without seam and woven from the top throughout [cf. Jn 19.23], is his faith and the unity of his Church, which heretics, false Christians and simoniacs want to divide. These are Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Baldad and Sophar, who afflicted blessed Job with their words, and cast insults upon him. Eliphaz means 'contempt of the Lord', and he stands for heretics who despise obedience to Christ's Church. Baldad means 'lonely old age', and he represents false Christians who are 'grown old in evil days' [cf. Dan 13.52]. Sophar means 'ruined watch-tower', standing for simoniacs who destroy the watch-tower of ecclesiastical dignity by buying it for money.

**(Against discord: *If the priest shall find*.)**

Of leprosy in the house, Leviticus says:

*If [the priest] find that the leprosy is spread, he shall command that the stones wherein the leprosy is be taken out, and cast without the city into an unclean place: and that the house be scraped on the inside round about, and the dust of the scraping be scattered without the city into an unclean place; and that other stones be laid in the place of them that were taken away*. [Lev 14.39-42]

Leprosy in the house is discord in the community. If the priest (i.e. the superior) sees that it has spread, he must order that those stones (brethren of the community) in which there is this leprosy of discord immediately be cast out of the community, so that the scabby member cannot rub against his unaffected colleague, and '*a little leaven corrupt the whole mass*' [1Cor 5.6; Gal 5.9], or a little poison make the entire ointment toxic. To 'scrape the house' (the community itself) so that no remains of leprosy be left, he must search carefully, and if he finds any such thing he must cast it out. Then, instead of the leprous stones, he should replace new stones in the fabric of the community, to serve the Lord in unity of spirit and concord of life.

**(The five things the penitent should have: *He should let his clothes*.)**

If anyone should be infected with this kind of five-fold leprosy, and should want to beg mercy from the Lord, he should do the five things mentioned before: he should 'let his clothes hang loose', that is, he should not trust in any merit of his own, and presume upon no deed of his own. Alternatively, the 'loose clothes' refer to his bodily members, afflicted by harsh penance. He should 'have his head bare', by laying bare whatever he has done wrong with his bodily senses. He should 'have his mouth covered with a cloth', always being ashamed of what he has done. He should 'cry out at all times' that he is defiled and unclean; and regarding himself as unclean he should dwell alone, far from the tumult of worldly and evil thoughts, 'outside the camp', reckoning himself unworthy of the company of saints. Whoever lacks these five characteristics is not truly penitent.

So whoever wants to be truly penitent should have his clothes loose, presuming on nothing of his own. In confession, he should bare his head before God and his angels. He should be ashamed to have done such things, and not only should he proclaim himself defiled and unclean, he should humbly bear it if others reproach him as such. If he acts otherwise, he is not really sorry. He should reckon himself like a leper, unworthy of the society of saints; and he should cast himself at their feet with a humble mind. So we read[5] that "Those doing public penance used to stand at the church doors, dressed in sack-cloth, and humbly beg the faithful entering the church, saying, We unworthy sinners beg you, faithful of Christ, to pour forth prayers for us for divine mercy; because we are unworthy to enter the church and take part in the assembly of the faithful."

Such people can say, boldly, *Jesus, master, have mercy on us*. Note the three words, 'Jesus', 'master' and 'mercy'. Jesus means 'salvation'. If anyone wants salvation, he should keep the master's words, and so find mercy. The word 'master' comes between

'Jesus' and 'mercy'; if you keep the master's words, you will find salvation on your right hand and mercy on your left, to guard your observance. As Ecclesiasticus says:

*If thou wilt keep the commandments... they shall preserve thee*. [Ecclus 15.16]

**(The wholesome shame in confessing, and the circumstances of sin that should be confessed: *Esther with a rosy colour in her face*.)**

13. *Whom, when he saw, he said: Go, show yourselves to the priests*. Note the three words, 'go', 'show' and 'priests'. 'Go' indicates contrition of heart, 'show' confession by the mouth, and 'priests' satisfaction in deed.

Regarding the 'go' of contrition, the prodigal son in Luke says:

*I will arise and will go to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee*. [Lk 15.18]

First he says, 'I will arise', and then, 'I will go'; because if you do not first rouse yourself from your lethargy, you will not be able to 'go' in contrition. 'I will arise', because I recognise that I am lying prostrate; 'I will go', because I have gone far away; 'to my father', because I am growing faint with misery and need under the master of swine; 'I have sinned against heaven', before the angels and saints who are God's throne; 'and before you', in the depths of conscience which only you penetrate.

Regarding the 'show' of confession, the Bridegroom says in Canticles:

*Show me thy face. Let thy voice sound in my ears:*

*for thy voice is sweet and thy face comely*. [Cant 2.14]

We are recognised by our faces, and so the face represents confession, which makes us known to God who *knows the way of the just* [Ps 1.6]. *The just is first accuser of himself* [Prov 18.17].

So 'show me your face', if you want me to show you mine*, on which the angels desire to gaze* [1Pt 1.12]. Thy face is comely: a 'comely face' is an ashamed confession. When confession is joined to blushes, it is a lovely sight; and so the Book of Esther tells how she,

*with a rosy colour in her face, and with gracious and bright eyes, hid a mind full of anguish and exceeding great fear. So going in she passed through all the doors in order, and stood before the king*. [Esth 15.8-9]

Esther is the penitent soul, whose face in confession should be suffused with the rosy

colour of shame. Shame blushes at the truth, and whoever fears the true judgements of God undoubtedly has the shame which, in confession, leads to glory. Whoever does not blush, does not fear. Jeremiah says:

*Thou hast a harlot's forehead, thou wouldst not blush*. [Jer 3.3]

But Esther had a mind that was sorrowful and constrained by fear, because the penitent is worn down with sorrow in contrition, and constrained with fear in confession. Her gracious eyes are bright with the tears she has shed, and she enters through all the doors in order, numbering all her sins just as she has committed them, the sins which like doors bar us from the entrance to eternal life. In confession, the words 'passing through all the doors in order, she stood before the king' are very noteworthy. You will not be able to stand before Jesus Christ, if you do not first unlock all the doors. Only then will you be able to show him your face. He himself explains what that face is, when he adds, *Let thy voice sound in my ears, for thy voice is sweet*. The Bridegroom delights to hear the melody of confession, with his loving ears. Notice that he says, 'voice'. There is 'voice' when the tongue strikes the air, to express the intention of the mind. There is true confession when sin is 'struck' or rebuked, showing what is hidden within. It is appropriate, the, to say 'show yourselves'. Do it yourself, not through others. Because you have sinned in yourself and by yourself, you should show yourself by yourself.

There follows, *to the priests*. Because they enjoin penance, they represent satisfaction. These words clearly show that sinners should show themselves to priests in confession, to whom is committed authority to bind and loose.

There follows: *And as they went, they were cured*. See how great God's mercy is; he cleanses souls from sin by contrition alone, as long as they have a firm intention to confess. There is a concordance in Job to these three words, where the Lord says to the friends:

*Take unto you therefore seven oxen and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer for yourselves a holocaust*. [Job 42.8]

The ox and the ram denote the neck and horns of pride. If anyone slays these in himself, he drives all vices from himself, indicated by the word 'seven'. The Lord says 'go' in the Gospel, and also in Job. In the former he says, 'show', in the latter, 'offer'. In the former, 'to the priests', in the latter, 'to my servant Job'.

14. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause:

*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are*

*fornication* (the killing of beauty),

*uncleanness* (which consists in pollution of mind, even without action),

*luxury* (excess in food and drink),

*avarice* (the *service of idols* [cf. Col 3.5]; the avaricious man is avid for gold),

*witchcrafts* (poisoning, which gets into the bloodstream, and cannot harm unless it reaches the blood, because poison is cold and the fiery soul flees from it. ‘Poisons’ mean the suggestions of the devil and the flatteries of sinners, which cannot hurt us unless the reach the ‘blood’, the consent of the soul),

*enmities* (which continue),

*contentions* (in words),

*emulations* (when two people are after the same thing),

*wraths* (sudden storms of the soul),

*quarrels* (leading to angry blows),

*dissensions* (when parties arise in the Church),

*sects* (heresies which cut it in pieces),

*envies* (of others’ goods),

*murders, drunkenness, revellings*. [Gal 5. 19-21]

From all these, leprosy arises in the soul, infecting it and driving it from the community of the saints.

We ask you then, Lord Jesus Christ, to cleanse us from the leprosy of sin, so that being clean we may re-enter the congregation of the saints, and be able to go up with you to the heavenly Jerusalem. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(A theme for a sermon on giving praise to God for mercy received: *One of them*.)**

15. There follows, thirdly:

*And one of them, when he saw that he was made clean, went back, with a loud voice*

*glorifying God. And he fell on his face before his feet, giving thanks: and this was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering, said, Were not ten made clean? and where are the nine? There is no-one found to return and give glory to God, but this stranger. And he said to him: Arise, go thy way; for thy faith hath made thee whole*. [Lk 17.15-19]

The foreigner did three things: he returned, he fell on his face, and he gave thanks.

Someone 'returns' when he attributes no virtue to himself. Whatever good he does, he recognises as coming from mercy. He is called a 'Samaritan' (guard) because he attributes to God those good things that he receives, so as to say with the psalmist: *I will keep my strength to thee* [Ps 58.10], that is, 'by attributing it to thee'. Do you want to keep what you have received? Then attribute it to God, not yourself. If you give yourself credit for what is not yours, you are guilty of theft. And if you do not ascribe to yourself what belongs to another, you make what is yours another's. There is a **concordance** to this in Job, where the Lord says to him:

*Canst thou send lightnings? And will they go,*

*and will they return and say to thee: Here we are?* [Job 38.35]

Lightning goes forth from the clouds, and in the same way wonderful works are shown by holy preachers. When preachers shine with miracles, lightning goes forth. When they return, they say, 'Here we are', when they credit God's power, not their own, with the mighty works they know they have done. Alternatively, 'sending' and 'going' refers to going out from the secrecy of contemplation to public activity. 'Returning', and saying to God, 'Here we are', refers to their return to contemplation after their outward activity.

**(On the ruin of the just man, and the two kinds of temptation: *A mountain falling*.)**

16. Again, someone 'falls on his face' when he is ashamed of the evil things he has done. A man 'falls' when he is brought low. He who falls on his face can see where he is falling; he who falls on his back cannot. So, the good fall on their faces, because they humble themselves in regard to visible things, seeing what follows from them, so that they may rise to what is unseen. Bad people fall backwards, onto what they cannot see, because they do not see the consequences of their actions. There is a **concordance** in Job regarding these two falls; first:

*Job rent his garments: and having shaven his head fell down upon the ground*. [Job 1.20]

Our 'garments' are the works that cover us, lest we be naked and ashamed. When guilt makes us weep for them, we attack them fiercely, with an angry hand. Then, all conceited and unnecessary thoughts fall away from the mind, like hair from a shaven head, presumptuous thoughts are repressed and we recognise how weak we are in ourselves. It is difficult to do great things, and not to trust one's own power to accomplish them.

On the second fall, we read:

*A mountain falling cometh to nought:*

*and a rock is removed out of its place.*

*Waters wear away the stones:*

*and with inundation the ground little by little is washed away*. [Job 14.18-19]

Note that there are two sorts of temptation: one that arise from some sudden event, and another that comes into the mind little by little, and infects the soul by gradual temptation. The meaning is this: just as these inanimate objects sometimes fall suddenly, and sometimes are worn away gradually by the flowing waters: so a man set on high, like a mountain, may be thrown down by a sudden temptation. An example is David, when he saw Bathsheba. Another case is when he is slowly eroded over a long period, like Solomon, with his immoderate and too frequent recourse to women. He who had first built God's Temple, later set up a house of idols. A 'rock' (the just man's mind) may be removed from its place, from justice to guilt, by a sudden impulse. 'Stones' (strength of mind) may be worn away by the waters, by the constant blandishments of lust. The word used suggests erosion by flood-waters.

17. So the Samaritan gave thanks for his cleansing; and the Lord praised him for so doing, saying, *Were not ten made clean?* He asked where the ungrateful were, as if they were unknown to him. This is a lesson to us, to give thanks to the Lord for the benefits he has given us. If Job blessed God's name and gave thanks in his sufferings, how much more should we give thanks for so many blessings bestowed on us? Ezechias fell ill because he did not sing a hymn of thanksgiving after his victory. We read that Moses' sister Miriam, and Deborah and Judith, sang songs to the Lord for victory over their enemies. This teaches us that we should return songs of praise and thanksgiving to God, the bestower of all good things.

In this clause there are three words we should note particularly: 'one', 'Samaritan' and 'foreigner', which represent three virtues. 'One' means the concord that comes from unity; 'Samaritan' represents the guarding of humility; 'foreigner' is finding sufficient for our needs in poverty. These three correspond to the Lord's words, 'Rise', 'go' and 'your faith has saved you'. Arise, for you are at one. Go, for you are a Samaritan. Your faith has saved you, because you are a foreigner. He who lives in unity, rises to the uprightness of good works. He who strengthens himself with the guard of humility, goes safely everywhere. He who signs himself in this world with the mark of poverty, like a stranger, will find that the faith of Jesus Christ, who was poor and a stranger, will save him.

18. The third part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this clause:

*The fruit of the spirit is*

*charity*, (which Augustine calls ‘the soul’s will to enjoy God for his own sake, and self and neighbour for God’s sake),

*joy*, (purity of conscience),

*peace*, (tranquil freedom, coming from agreement),

*patience*, (which we exercise in three ways: enduring some things from God, as sufferings; some from the enemy, as temptation; some from our neighbour, as persecution, injury and insult. We should be wary of all these, so as not to murmur too much against the chastisements of our maker; not to be seduced into consenting to sin; and not to be disturbed by evil, lest by so doing we have to pay for the good things we now enjoy).

*longsuffering*, (in hope),

*goodness*, (sweetness of spirit),

*kindness*, (in giving, being generous, warm and friendly),

*meekness*, (returning no-one’s injury, being gentle),

*faith*, (by which we truly believe what we cannot see at all. Properly, we speak of faith when what is said is utterly reliable),

*modesty*, (observing a proper demeanour in words and deeds),

*continence*, (which abstains even from what is lawful),

*chastity*, (which uses rightly what is lawful). [Gal 5.22-23]

Blessed is that tree which bears such fruit! Blessed is that soul which eats such fruit! You cannot have these fruits unless you return with the one Samaritan and foreigner, fall on your face, and give thanks. Then you will deserve to hear: *Rise, go in peace, your faith has saved you*.

We ask you, then, Lord Jesus Christ, to keep us in unity, and to guard us in humility and poverty; whereby we may gather the fruits of the spirit from the tree of penitence, and eat of the tree of life in heavenly glory. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Job 39.21-22

[2] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Job 39.27-29

[3] cf. *GLOSSA ORDINARIA* on Job 22.27-28

[4] GREGORY, *Moralia* V,46,86; PL 75.729

[5] cf. CAESARIUS OF ARLES, *Sermo* 67

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost: *No man can serve two masters*, which is divided into three clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, a theme for a sermon on the Passion of Jesus Christ, and on the formation of our life from the pattern of his life, on *The angel Raphael*.)**

1. At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: *No man can serve two masters*. [Mt 6.24]

We read in Tobias that the angel Raphael said to Tobias:

*Take out the entrails of the fish, and lay up his heart, and his gall, and his liver for thee; for*

*these are necessary for useful medicines*. [Tob 6.5]

Let us see what is meant by the fish, and by its heart, gall and liver.

The fish is Christ, who says to Peter in Matthew:

*Go to the sea and cast in a hook; and the fish which shall first come up, take; and when thou hast opened up its mouth, thou shalt find a stater; take that and give it to them for me and thee*. [Mt 17.26]

The fish is Christ, dwelling in this great and wide sea, who first came up (that is, offered himself to death for our redemption) so that what was found in his mouth (confession) might be offered for Peter and the Lord. That fee was appropriate, but divided, because it was for Peter as for a sinner, whereas the Lord did no sin. A stater is worth two *didrachmae*, showing a likeness to our flesh, since for the same price the Lord and the servant are set free. Alternatively, the stater in Christ's mouth stands for mercy and justice; mercy, when he said:

*Come to me, all you that labour and are burdened; and I will refresh you*; [Mt 11.28]

justice, when he said:

*Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire*. [Mt 25.41]

*Take the entrails of this fish*- that is, consider carefully the life of Christ himself- and you will find there heart, gall and liver. By the heart we are wise, by the gall we are angry, and by the liver we love. The heart of Jesus Christ denotes his wisdom, the gall his bitter suffering, the liver his love. Season your tastelessness with the savour of wisdom *that reacheth from end to end mightily and ordereth all things sweetly* [Wisd 8.1]. Mingle the bitterness of his Passion with your pleasure. Set his love above every love; without it any other should be called sorrow rather than love. These are the medicines useful to your soul, and if you apply them to yourself you will be servant of God, not of the devil; of the spirit, not of the flesh; of heaven, not of the world.

Christ's wisdom breaks the devil's dominion, as Job says:

*His wisdom hath struck the proud one*. [Job 26.12]

The ancient enemy is struck down by wisdom rather than by might; for while he dared to assail Christ, over whom he had no power, he justly lost man, whom he had held as of right. The bitterness of Christ's Passion subdues the appetite of the flesh; as someone has said: "The remembrance of the Crucified crucifies vices."[1] See in the Gospel: *A blind man sat* [Quinquagesima]. The ointment of his love drives out the poison of riches. The same book of Tobias says that *the smoke thereof* (that is, the devotion of his love) *driveth away all kinds of devils* [Tob 6.8], that is, riches that tear and afflict men like demons. All the rich of this world are like people possessed by devils, running hither and thither, serving not the true but the false master. Of them today's Gospel says: *No man can serve two masters*.

2. Note that I want to divide this Gospel into three clauses. The first is: *No one can*. The second is: *I say to you, be not solicitous*. The third is: *Seek first the kingdom of God*. The first treats of the two masters; the second drives out anxiety; the third commands us to seek the kingdom of God before all things. Note that on this third Sunday in September, the book of Tobias is read in Church, from which I want to draw some texts and **concord** with the clauses of the Gospel.

The Introit sung in today's Mass is: *Have mercy on me, O Lord*. The Epistle is from that of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians: *If we live in the spirit, let us also walk in the spirit*. I will divide this into three parts and **concord** them with the aforesaid clauses of the Gospel. The first part is*: If we live in the spirit*. The second: *Bear ye one another's burdens*. The third: *He that soweth in the spirit*, etc.

Pay attention to the fact that this Epistle is read with this Gospel: in the Gospel the Lord forbids care for our life (our animality) and teaches us to seek the kingdom of God; in the Epistle, Paul teaches us to live according to the spirit, to sow not in the flesh but in the

spirit. He who sows in the latter, reaps eternal life.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(On the two parts of the soul: *No man can*.)**

3. Let us say, then:

*No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other; or he will sustain the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon*. [Mt 8.24]

The soul has two parts, reason and sensuality, which are like two masters. Of the dominion of reason, Isaac says in Genesis:

*I have appointed him thy lord, and have made all his brethren his servants*. [Gen 27.37]

This comes about when our own will and the bodily senses are made subject to the rule of reason. Thus Jacob says of Juda, in the same book:

*Tying his foal to the vineyard, and his ass, O my son, to the vine*. [Gen 49.11]

Juda is the penitent, the vineyard is reason, the vine is compunction, the ass is sensuality and the foal its movements. Juda ties his ass to the vine and the foal to the vineyard, when the penitent subjects his heart's sensuality to compunction, and lays the yoke of reason upon its movements.

In the same book of Genesis, this passage occurs where Joseph says to his brothers:

*I thought we were binding sheaves in the field: and my sheaf arose as it were, and stood, and your sheaves standing about bowed down before my sheaf. His brethren answered: Shalt thou be our king? Or shall we be subject to thy dominion?* [Gen 37.7-8]

A sheaf is a bundle of straw such as a hand can hold. Joseph is the just man, and his sheaf is reason. When it arises in contempt of temporal things, and stands still in the height of contemplation, then the sheaves which are the senses of the flesh are made subject to its command. Whence Isaac says in Genesis:

*Be thou lord of thy brethren, and let thy mother's children bow down before thee*.[Gen 27.29]

And Isaiah:

*And the children of them that afflict thee* (carnal desires) *shall come bowing down to thee;*

*and all that slandered thee shall worship the steps of thy feet.* [Is 60.14]

Of the dominion of sensuality, Moses says in Deuteronomy:

*Because thou didst not serve the Lord thy God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things: ... Thou shalt serve thy enemy ... and he shall put an iron yoke upon thy neck, till he consume thee.* [Dt 28.47-48]

Because Adam would not serve his superior, his inferior would not serve him; indeed, he himself served his enemy, the devil or his flesh, than which no enemy is more capable of hurt. Its iron yoke, sensuality or carnality, is placed upon the neck of reason. So Ecclesiasticus says;

*A heavy yoke is placed upon the children of Adam,*

*from the day of their coming out.* [Ecclus 40.1]

There is a heavy yoke on Adam's children, from the day original sin came forth, the tinder of sin, concupiscence, which (as St Augustine[2] says) is not permitted to reign. There are also its desires, actual concupiscences, which are the devil's weapons arising from the weakness of our nature. This weakness is a tyrant which causes evil desires. Do you want to hear how heavy is the yoke on Adam's children? Hear what is written in the Church Dogmatics[3] : "Hold most firmly, and in no wise doubt, that every man conceived through the union of a man and a woman is born with original sin, subject to impiety, liable to death and because of this *by nature a child of wrath* [Eph 2.3], from which no-one can be freed except by faith in the Mediator between God and man."

**(On the dominion of reason and sensuality: God gave favour to Tobias; and: *When Salmanasar was dead*; and on the nature of the beaver.)**

4. Let us say, then: *No man can serve two masters*. Regarding these two masters, there is a **concordance** in the book of Tobias, where mention is made of Salmanasar and Sennacherib:

*God gave Tobias favour in the sight of Salmanasar the king. And he gave him leave to go whithersoever he would, with liberty to do whatever he had a mind*. [Tob 1.13-14]

Salmanasar means 'purifying those in trouble', and he stands for reason, which when it reigns pacifies the troubled mind, enlightens conscience, delights the heart, smooths what is rough and lightens what is heavy. If a man serves it, he is made free and has the power to go where he wants and do what he wants. What a free servitude, and serving freedom! It is not fear that makes him a servant and love a free man: rather, fear makes

him free and love makes him serve*. There is no law for the just man; he is a law to himself* [cf. 1Tim 1.9; Rom 2.14]. He has charity, he lives according to reason, and so he goes where he wants and does what he wants:

*I am thy servant, and the son of thy handmaid*, [Ps 115.16]

says the prophet. Notice those words, servant and son. Because I am a servant, therefore I am a son. O gentle fear, that makes a servant a son! O kind and true love, that makes a son a servant! I am the son of thy handmaid. If you want to enjoy freedom, O man*, put your neck into her chains and your feet into her fetters* [Ecclus 6.25]. There is no greater joy than the joy of freedom, and you cannot attain it unless you put your proud neck into the collar of humility, and the feet of carnal affection into the fetters of mortification. Then you will be able to say, *I am thy servant*...

Again, in the same book it says that when Salmanasar the king was dead, Sennacherib reigned in his place, who had a hatred for the children of Israel, and commanded that Tobias be slain and all his goods confiscated. Tobias, fleeing naked with his son and his wife, lay hidden [cf Tob 1.18,22-23]. Sennacherib means ‘removing the desert’, and he stands for sensuality, the concupiscence of the flesh, which takes from the human mind the desert of penitence. It cannot reign unless reason dies. Virtue goes out so that vice may come in. Concupiscence hates the children of Israel, penitents who *crucify their flesh with its vices and concupiscences* [cf. Gal 5.24]. So it says in Exodus:

*The Egyptians hated the children of Israel*. [Ex 1.13]

By means of its followers, the bodily senses, it tries to kill the spirit and take away all its goods, the virtues. They are called our ‘substance’, because they sustain a man, lest he fall away from what is eternal. To keep them, he must flee with son and wife, and lie hidden.

Note the three words, fleeing, naked and lying hid. Do you want to escape the concupiscence of the flesh? Flee! Flee fornication [1Cor 6.18]. So it says in Genesis that Joseph,

*leaving his garment in his mistress’s hand, fled and went out.* [Gen 39.12]

He left his garment rather than lose God. Natural History tells us that the animal called the beaver has testicles which are medicinal for the cure of paralysis, and for this reason it is pursued by hunters. Realising that this is why they hunt it, it tears them off and falls on its pursuers. It is called (in Latin) *castor*, because it castrates itself. Foolish man does the opposite: he surrenders to the devil for the sake of his worthless glands, for vile lust. *Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent*, says Ecclesiasticus [21.2].

Again, he is naked if he attributes nothing to himself, but everything to God. He does not hide himself with Adam among the fig-leaves, covering himself with excuses and

blaming other people. He knows that he is as naked as when he came from his mother's womb.

Again, he lies hidden when he shuts himself up in a quiet conscience, far from the noise of worldly folk and evil thoughts. He lies hidden when he bears injury patiently, when he does not grumble in adversity or boast in prosperity.

The wife and son of Tobias are goodwill and good deeds, which should accompany us wherever we go. As Matthew says [Mt 2.13]: *Take the child* (purity of deed) *and his mother* (goodwill, that gives it birth) *and fly into Egypt* (recognise yourself as a poor exile, and consider the darkness of your sins), *and be there until I shall tell thee* (recognise that you are a sinner, and ponder on your exile until the time I say: *Arise, make haste, my love, and come. For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone* [Cant 2.10-11]). If you want to make haste, you must fly from Sennacherib, and serve reason, not sensuality. Let us say, then, *No man can serve two masters*.

**(On the Testament of God's love: *All the days of thy life*.)**

5. There follows*: For either he will hate the one and love the other; or he will sustain the one and despise the other*. Note these four words: love and sustain, hate and despise. If you love life, hate life; if you sustain a superior, you will despise an inferior; and, conversely, love yourself as God made you and loved you, but hate yourself to the extent that you have hated what God made and loved in you. This is what Tobias said to his son:

*All the days of thy life have God in thy mind,*

*and take heed thou never consent to sin,*

*nor transgress the commandments of our God.* [Tob 4.6]

O word sweeter than honey and the honeycomb: *Always have God in thy mind!* O mind that has God, blessed above all blessedness, happy above all happiness! What is lacking to you? What can be added to you? You have all things, having him who made all things, who alone fills you and without whom all that is, is nothing. Therefore, *always have God in your mind*.

See what a Testament Tobias drew up for his son, what a legacy he left him! *Always have God in your mind.* O possession that possesses all things, blessed is he who possesses you, happy he who has you! O God, what can I give, that I may possess you? Do you suppose that if I gave everything there is, I would be able to have you? What price could I offer for you? You are higher than heaven, deeper than hell, wider than the earth and broader than the sea. How then can a worm, 'a dead dog, a single flea' [cf 1Kg (Sm) 24.15], a son of man, have you? As Job says:

*Silver shall not be weighed in exchange for it.*

*It shall not be compared with the dyed colours of India,*

*or with the most precious stone sardonyx, or the sapphire.*

*Gold or crystal cannot equal it;*

*neither shall any vessels of gold be changed for it.* [Job 28.15-16]

O Lord God, I do not have these things, so what must I give to have you? "Give me yourself," he says, "and I will give you myself. Give your mind and you will have me in your mind. Keep all your possessions for yourself, just give me your mind. I am full of your words, I have no need of your deeds: just give me your mind." Note that it says, ‘always’. Do you want to have God in your mind always? Then have yourself always before your mind’s eye. Where your eye is, there is your mind. Always have an eye on yourself. I put three things before you: your mind, your eye, yourself. God is in your mind, your mind is in your eye, your eye is in you. So if you see yourself, you have God in yourself. Do you want to have God always in your mind? Be just as he made you to be. Do not go seeking another ‘you’. Do not make yourself otherwise than he made you. Then you will always have God in mind.

There follows: *You cannot serve God and mammon*. The Gloss says here: "Mammon, in the Syrian tongue, is wealth. To serve it is to deny God. He does not say, having them: that is lawful. He says, serving: the mark of a miser. It is said that this is the name of a demon who presides over wealth; not because they are in his gift, but because he uses them to deceive, setting snares of riches." Cursed mammon! Alas, how many religious he has blinded! How many monks he has infatuated! How many seculars he has cast into hell! This is the swallows’ dung that blinded the eyes of Tobias. (See the Gospel: *A blind man sat by the wayside* [Quinquagesima].)

6. To this first clause, the first part of the Epistle is **concordant**:

*If we live in the spirit, let us walk in the spirit* [Gal 5.25].

In this first part the Apostle includes two things, reason and the concupiscence of the flesh. From reason it comes that we live and walk in the spirit, that is in a spiritual way of life. From concupiscence it comes that we are made desirous of vainglory, provoking one another, envying one another [Gal 5.26]. Again, from the concupiscence of the flesh it comes that someone is preoccupied in some sin; but it is from reason that spiritual people, who make use of reason, correct the offender in a spirit of gentleness, because it belongs to reason (as we have said) to pacify those in trouble.

We ask you then, Lord Jesus Christ, to pour the light of your grace into us, whereby we

may live according to reason, subdue the flesh, and come at last to you who are life. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A theme for a sermon against solicitude for temporal things: *I say to you, be not solicitous*; and: *Cyrus wishing*.)**

7. There follows, secondly:

*I say to you, be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than the meat and the body more than the raiment? Behold the birds of the air*, etc. [Mt 6.25ff.]

Notice that there are three things specially to be noted in this second clause: the birds, the lilies and the grass; and we shall discuss each of them.

*I say to you*, lest by care for things that are nothing you be held back from those that are eternal, *be not solicitous* (because this is to serve riches) *for your life*, your animal nature for which food and clothing are necessary. The Gloss says here, "Bread is prepared in the sweat of your brow. Labour must be expended, but care must be taken away, care that disturbs the mind with the fear that we may lose what we do not hang on to, that what we have worked for may fail." Is not your life more than food? The actual word is ‘soul’, but it means the life that food sustains. It as if to say, he who gave the greater things (life and the body) will also give the lesser (food and clothing). No-one should doubt these promises of Truth. If a man is as he should be, at once all things are added to him. They were made for him. Care distracts the mind, and when the mind is distracted it is divided, and when it is divided the devil seizes it and kills it.

We read in the Histories[4] , on the story of Daniel, that Cyrus, wishing to capture the city of Babylon, divided the Euphrates some way from the city into several streams. The channel that flowed through the city was made fordable, and so by it the enemy entered the city under the wall, and king Balthassar was slain. The city is the soul, the Euphrates is the human mind, the channel is the grace of the Holy Spirit. When the devil wants to capture our soul, he first divides our mind by many cares. Some of them appear to be necessary, others appear to be fraternal charity; and as he thus divides it, the stream of compunction is dried up, and when it is dried up the city is captured, and reason perishes. *I say to you*, then, *be not solicitous*.

**(For contemplatives: *Behold the birds of the air*; and: *Tobias, of the tribe*; and on the nature of birds.)**

8. There follows:

*Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them*. [Mt 6.26]

The birds are the saints, who fly to heaven on the wings of contemplation, who are so removed from the world that they have no business on earth. They do not labour, but by contemplation alone they already live in heaven. There is a **concordance** on this in the book of Tobias, where we read of Tobias himself, and of Anna [sic: he means Sara] the daughter of Raguel, that they were like two birds in the sky. Of Tobias it says:

*Tobias of the tribe and city of Nephthali (which is in the upper parts of Galilee above Naasson, beyond the way that leadeth to the west, having on the left hand the city of Sephet).* [Tob 1.1]

Tobias means ‘the good man of the Lord’; Nephthali is ‘breadth’; Galilee, ‘a wheel’; Naasson, ‘an augury’; Sephet, ‘a letter’ or ‘beauty’.

Tobias is any just man who believes that the good he has in himself is not his own, but the Lord’s, saying with the prophet: *Thou hast done well with thy servant, O Lord* [Ps 118.65]; and with Isaiah*: Thou hast wrought all our works, O Lord* [Is 26.12]; *He made us, and not we ourselves* [Ps 99.3]. This good lord is said to be of the tribe and city of Naphtali. He is the son and citizen of ‘breadth’, that is, of charity:

*Thy commandment is exceeding broad*. [Ps 118.96]

Christ established a covenant with his children,

*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you*. [Jn 15.12]

The just man, like a son, possesses it as his rightful inheritance, and always dwells in it as in a city:

*I shall abide in the inheritance of the Lord*, [Ecclus 24.11]

because

*My inheritance is goodly to me*. [Ps 15.6]

And where is this city? In the upper part of Galilee, above Naasson. Behold the bird flying upwards! The Lord says in John:

*I am from above, you are from beneath*. [Jn 8.23]

You go about the earth like a wheel, rolling to destruction. You roll downhill from vice to vice. The city of the just man, the good man of the Lord, is not in the lower parts, but the

upper parts of Galilee, seeking what is above and leaving behind what is spinning below. His city is above Naasson, an augury of things above, contemplating heavenly things. See how beautifully **concordant** the history is with the Gospel!

Augury is the study of the sounds and behaviour of birds, observing what birds say and do. A bird follows no set pathway, and the contemplative who flies above has no direct route, since contemplation is not from the will of the contemplative, but in the disposition of the Creator, who infuses the sweetness of contemplation into whoever he will, when and how he wills. So Jeremiah says:

*I know, O Lord, that the way of a man is not his:*

*neither is it in a man to walk and to direct his steps*. [Jer 10.23]

Note, too, that some birds have long legs, and fly with them stretched out behind, while others have short legs and feet, and draw them up to their bellies as they fly, so that they do not get in the way. Short feet do not impede flying. There are two kinds of contemplative. Some have to care for others, and this is a hindrance to them. Others have no such responsibilities, for themselves or for others, and they pay no heed to their own needs. The former have 'long legs', the latter short ones. When the former give themselves to prayer, and fly in contemplation, they should let their feet, their concern for others' needs, stretch out behind them, so as not to hinder their flight. My brother: when you are serving your brother, set your feet before you, devote yourself entirely to him; but when you are attending to God, let your feet stretch behind, so that your flight may be free. Forget what lies behind, the duties and good deeds you have been engaged in, and will do again, and in prayer set aside all thoughts of them. They often occur, and they greatly hinder the mind of the contemplative. The second kind, the 'short legged', who do not attend to others or themselves, as it were draw up their feet to their bellies (I mean their affections, brief and short). They recollect themselves, so that with unified mind they may fly more easily, and fix their mind's eye with unshakeable gaze upon the golden splendour of the sun. It is appropriate, then, that Tobias was *of the tribe and city of Nephthali, which is in the upper parts of Galilee above Naasson*.

9. There follows: *Beyond the way that leadeth to the west, having on the left hand the city of Sephet*. The just man leaves behind the broad way that leads to 'sunset'- death. The prophet says:

*Let their way become dark and slippery:*

*and let the angel of the Lord pursue them*. [Ps 34.6]

In this present life, the way of sinners is dark because of their mental blindness, and slippery from their evildoing. At death, the bad angel will pursue them and drive them until he casts them into the abyss of burning fire. The just man leaves on his left hand the city of Sephet, letters and beauty, because he reckons false and 'sinister' that

science which is falsely so-called, and he rejects worldly philosophy and temporal beauty. *Behold*, then, *the birds of the air*!

The same book speaks then of Anna [i.e. Sara], saying that:

*She went into an upper chamber of her house; and for three days and three nights did neither eat nor drink. But continuing in prayer with tears, she besought the Lord.* [Tob 3.10-11]

See Anna (meaning 'grace') going above like a bird on the wing! Even so the just man goes into the upper chamber of his mind. Christ on the mountain and Daniel in his upper room prayed like that. Eliseus and Elias both had upper rooms, and Christ celebrated the Pasch in the upper room. For three days and three nights, because in prosperity and in adversity the just man offers prayer to the Holy Trinity. Notice the order: first she went into the upper chamber, then she neither ate nor drank, then she continued in prayer, and shed tears. Whoever wants to fly must proceed in the same way. First he must raise his mind from earthly things, then he must afflict his body, persevere in prayer and shed tears. As the Gloss says, "Prayer softens God, and tears compel him. One soothes, the other pricks." So, behold the birds of the air!

And see how well the Introit of today's Mass is **concordant** with this Sunday's history:

*Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I have cried to thee all the day...*

*For thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild:*

*and plenteous in mercy to all that call upon thee.* [Ps 85.3,5]

We read in the same book that Tobias and Anna [ie. Sara] cried to the Lord, begging for mercy:

*Tobias began to pray with tears, saying:*

*Thou art just, O Lord, and all thy judgements are just;*

*and all thy ways mercy and truth...*

*And now, O Lord, do with me mercifully according to thy will.* [Tob 3.1,2,6]

And Anna [i.e. Sara]:

*Blessed is thy name, O God of our fathers:*

*who when thou hast been angry with us shew mercy,*

*and in the time of tribulation forgivest the sins of them that call upon thee...*

*But this every one is sure of that worshippeth thee,*

*that his life, if it be under trial, shall be crowned*

*and if it be under correction, it shall be allowed to come to thy mercy.*

*For thou art not delighted in our being lost*

*because after a storm thou makest a calm,*

*and after tears and weeping thou pourest in joyfulness.*

*Be thy name, O God of Israel, blessed for ever.* [Tob 3.13,21-23]

Well may both say, with the Introit, '*Have mercy on me*...' And it is clear from what follows how he was sweet and mild and plenteous in mercy to those who called on him:

*At that time the prayers of them both were heard in the sight of the glory of the most high God. And the holy angel of the Lord, Raphael, was sent to heal them both, whose prayers at one time were rehearsed in the sight of God*. [Tob 3.24-25]

**(Against the lovers of vanity: *I have seen those who work iniquity*.)**

10. Let us return to our matter: *Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns.* Note these three words: first, 'sow', to plant seeds; second, 'reap'; third, 'gather'. Let us see what they mean. Job says:

*I have seen those who work iniquity, and sow sorrows, and reap them,*

*perishing by the blast of God and consumed by the spirit of his wrath.* [Job 4.8-9]

He 'sows sorrows' by doing wrong; he 'reaps' when he profits from wrongdoing.

Of this, the prophet Hosea says:

*You have ploughed wickedness, you have reaped iniquity, you have eaten the fruit of lying*. [Hos 10.13]

He 'ploughs wickedness' when he schemes evil in his heart. He 'reaps iniquity' when he

carries out what he has schemed in his heart. He 'eats the fruit of lying' when he makes excuses for the evil he has done, assuring himself that he will not be punished for his wickedness. The serpent ploughed wickedness, Eve reaped iniquity, and Adam ate the fruit of lying when he said*, The woman, whom thou gavest me, gave me*... [Gen 3.12]. The devil ploughed by tempting, the flesh reaped by taking pleasure, and the spirit ate when reason gave in to sensuality. So Job says*, I have seen those who work iniquity, and sow sorrows, and reap them, perishing by the blast of God*. When we breathe, we draw air in from outside, and blow it out from inside. God is said to 'blast' retribution, because from outward causes he conceives his inner counsel of judgement, and from that inner counsel he sends forth his sentence. Because of our evil deeds, which he sees outwardly, he disposes himself to inward judgement; and from his inward thought condemnation is brought about outwardly.

O blind lovers of money and pleasure, blinded by the swallows' dung, the devil's mammon! Behold the birds of the air, those who contemplate heavenly things! They do not sow wickedness, they do not reap iniquity, and they do not gather the fruit of lying. Therefore the heavenly Father feeds them with tears of compunction, bitter sighing, and the desire for eternal things. He feeds them by printing upon them the poverty and humility of his Incarnation, the sorrow of his Passion, and the joy of his Resurrection. He feeds them with the sweetness of contemplation and the tenderness of heavenly beatitude.

**(On contempt of the world and the contemplation of God: *He who goes in by me*.)**

11. Christ himself says in John:

*By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved;*

*and he shall go in and go out, and shall find pastures*. [Jn 10.9]

By me: that is, through my side, opened by the spear. If any man enter in by faith, suffering and compassion, he will be safe, like a dove in a rock-cleft hiding from a hawk that is trying to catch it. He will go in so as to look at, criticise and test himself; and he will go out to consider, trample, despise and shun the variegated world. The life of the just man always consists in these two things: on going in, to find nothing except cause for weeping; on going out, to see nothing but what should be shunned.

In going out there is sadness, and so the penitent says in the psalm:

*I walked sorrowful all the day long*. [Ps 37.7]

Poor souls that we are, why should we not be sorrowful? Only if we fail to go in and consider our evil and wretched state. Oh, if only you would go into yourself, you would see nothing there but sorrow and trouble. Laughter would stop, there would be no room for merrymaking; grief and sorrow would bury every pleasure. Anna [i.e. Sara] the

daughter of Raguel entered into herself when she said:

*Thou knowest, O Lord, that I never coveted a husband,*

*and have kept my soul clean from all lust.*

*Never have I joined myself with them that play;*

*neither have I made myself partaker with them that walk in lightness.* [Tob 3.16-17]

Again, in the going out of the just man there is a flight, so that he says:

*I have gone far away, flying away;*

*and I abode in the wilderness*. [Ps 54.8]

He goes in and out, and finds pastures everywhere, in Christ's side, in his sorrow and his contempt for the world. So he can say, *My delight is to be with the Son of man* [cf. Prov 8.31], hanging on the wood of the Cross, fastened with nails, offered gall and vinegar to drink, his side pierced. O my soul, these are your delights, in these you are fulfilled and find joy. Whence Isaiah says to you:

*Then thou shalt see and abound, and thy heart shall wonder and be enlarged*. [Is 60.5]

You will see, my soul, the Son of God hanging on the Cross, and you will abound with joy, and be flooded with tears. Your heart will wonder at the Father's kindness, when he saw his Son hanging but did not take him down. Father, how could you restrain yourself? How was it that you did not rend the heavens and come down, and free your Beloved? In this wonderment, your heart will be enlarged to love the Father, who gave his Son to redeem you, and his Spirit to work in you.

Again, in sorrow of heart and contempt for the world the just man finds pastures for himself. So Job says of the wild ass (the penitent):

*He looketh round about the mountains of his pasture,*

*and seeketh for every green thing.* [Job 39.8]

The mountains of pasture are the heights of contemplation which inwardly refresh. When he looks round them, he is moved to sorrow and weeping. It is the mark of a penitent to 'seek every green thing', to despise what is transitory and to desire an eternal dwelling. All temporal things dry up when the joys of this present life reach their appointed end, as if parched by the summer sun; but evergreen are those things that no temporal end can dry up. The Lord says well, then: *The heavenly Father feeds them*.

There follows:

*Which of you by taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?*

*And for raiment why are you solicitous?* [Mt 6.27-28]

Previously he spoke of food; now he speaks of raiment. Stop bothering about measuring and clothing the body. He gives an example to reinforce his counsel:

*Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they labour not, neither do they spin.*

*But I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these*. [Mt 6.28-29]

The Gloss adds: "What kingly purple, what embroidery, can compare with the flowers? Colour itself is called the flowers' clothing, so that we say, it is covered with red." Solomon, who flourished more than anyone else, in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these flowers. He could not dress himself, as the lily does, in anything so snow-white; nor anything as red as a rose, and so for the rest.

**(On the three characteristics of the lily, and their meaning: *Consider the lilies of the field*.)**

12. Morally. Note that lilies have three properties: they are medicinal; they are white, and they are scented. The medicinal property is in the root, the whiteness and the scent are in the flower. lilies represent penitents, poor in spirit and crucifying their members with their vices and desires, who have humility in their hearts to repress the swelling of pride; the whiteness of chastity in their bodies; and the scent of a good reputation. They are called lilies of the field, not of the desert or of the garden. The field represents two things: established holiness and perfect charity. The field is the world, in which it is difficult, and to the same extent glorious, to survive. Hermits flower in the desert, avoiding human contact. Enclosed religious flower in a walled garden, and human concerns escape them. But it is a more glorious thing for penitents to flower in the field of the world, where the two-fold grace of the flower easily perishes: namely, the beauty of a virtuous way of life, and the scent of a good reputation.

Christ glories in being a flower of the field, saying in Canticles:

*I am the flower of the field*. [Cant 2.1]

This is the way blessed Mary, his Mother, is able to glory. She did not lose her bloom in the world, although she was neither recluse nor nun. She reckoned it to be more glorious to flower in the world than in the garden or in the desert. Even though it is a more

perilous thing (as Augustine[5] says), it can be a happier one. The field and plain are where battles are fought, and in the world the warfare that the flesh, the world and the devil wage is continual. A solid holiness is needed, unbroken by any attack. Whoever wants to go out to battle in the field, must first test his ability to stand firm in so cruel a struggle. Better to flower in garden or desert, than to wither in the field. Far better to stand in the former than to fall in the latter. The expression 'lilies of the field' also indicates the perfection of charity, which lays itself open to any passer-by that wants to pluck it. '*Give to anyone who asks you*', says the Lord [Lk 6.30], at least in terms of good will, if you lack resources; but if you can give both, all the better.

Consider, then, the lilies of the field, how they grow. They labour not, neither do they spin. Note these three things: they grow, they do not labour, they do not spin. In the same way the just grow from virtue to virtue, because they do not labour, or spin (twisting thread). They do not labour over the bricks of Egypt, the pleasures of the flesh. They do not spin, twisting the various threads of thought, with regard to temporal things. Do you want to grow? Do not labour in yourself, or spin in the world; and thus you will be poor. Joseph says in Genesis:

*God hath made me grow in the land of my poverty*. [Gen 41.42]

In the land of poverty, humility of heart, the just man grows. As he grows less in himself, so God grows more in him. As John the Baptist said,

*I must decrease, but he must increase*.[cf. Jn 3.30]

When you lessen youself, God grows in you; as Isaiah says:

*The least shall become a thousand,*

*and a little one a most strong nation*. [Is 60.22]

This comes about when he who is humble in his own eyes is raised up in perfection of mind and work. As the psalm says:

*Man shall come to a deep heart:*

*and God shall be exalted*. [Ps 63.8]

Depth may refer to highness or lowness; heaven, or the sea. When you come to a 'deep heart', the lowness of humility, God is exalted in you because he makes you to be raised above the vain things that cause affliction of spirit [cf. Eccles 1.14]. So consider, you creatures of time, you lovers of the fleeting moment, who labour and are burdened, who spin a never-ending thread: *consider how the lilies of the field grow*.

**(Against the wise of this world: *I say to you that not even Solomon*.)**

13. There follows: *I say to you that not even Solomon*... Solomon, the wisest of men, represents the worldy-wise who, in all their frivolous and fleeting glory, in all their pretentious knowledge and misleading eloquence, are not arrayed like one of these poor of Christ. These are clad in the whiteness of purity, the former in the crimson of carnal desire. These are clad in poverty and nakedness, the former are stripped by their very abundance. Clothed in iniquity and impiety [cf. Ps 72.6], they are stripped of virtue. Being clothed here, they will be naked hereafter. So the Lord says of them:

*And if the grass of the field, which is today and tomorrow is cast into the oven, God doth so clothe; how much more you, O ye of little faith?* [Mt 6.30]

The grass which feeds the fire stands for carnal folk whom God clothes 'today', in the present life (that is, he permits them to be clothed) with temporal things; and 'tomorrow', in the future, he will cast into the oven of burning fire. As Isaiah says:

*Behold, all you that kindle a fire, encompassed with flames,*

*walk in the light of your fire, and in the flames which you have kindled.*

*This is done to you by my hand; you shall sleep in sorrows*. [Is 50.11]

In the fire you have kindled here, you will be burnt there. Do you want to avoid this? Do not kindle it; or if you have kindled it, put it out- I mean the fire of sin.

Note the two adverbs, 'today' and 'tomorrow'. Today the sinner is, tomorrow he is not. Today he is clothed, tomorrow he is cast into the oven. As the first book of Maccabees says:

*Fear not the words of a sinful man, for his glory is dung and worms:*

*today he is lifted up, and tomorrow he shall not be found,*

*because he is returned into his earth and his thought is come to nothing*. [1Mac 2.62-63]

Today the sinner is clthed, and tomorrow he is cast into the oven. As Isaiah says:

*The garment mingled with blood shall be burnt,*

*and be fuel for the fire*. [Is 9.5]

The soul which dresses itself up in the garment of riches, with the blood of carnal

pleasure, will be food for the eternal fire. *If the grass*, etc.: as if to say, if God superfluities to carnal folk who are children of the eternal fire, to their own harm: how much more will he grant what is necessary to you who are faithful?

*Be not solicitous, therefore, saying: What shall we eat; or, What shall we drink; or, Wherewith shall we be clothed?* [Mt 6.31]

He returns to what he said at the beginning, and stresses it even more fully, that we should live without solicitude. The Gloss says of this text: "Here, he seems to criticize those who spurn the common food or clothing, and want food or clothing that is either finer or more austere than that of those with whom they live." *After all these things do the heathens seek* [Mt 6.32]. n future, no-one will care about them. What more can you expect of a heathen, who, because he has no faith, worries and wearies his mind with worldly cares? Care makes you like a heathen, a man without faith. *For your Father knoweth, that you have need of all these things* [Mt 6.32]. He does not close his heart to his dear children, so listen to your Father and do not doubt. He does give, if only your faithlessness does not prevent it.

14. To this second clause, the second part of the epistle is **concordant**:

*Bear ye one anothers' burdens; and so you shall fulfil the law of Christ.*[Gal 6.2]

You cannot carry someone else's burden unless you first put down your own. Disburden yourself first of your own, and you will be able to carry someone else's. When you are like a bird in the sky, or a lily in the field, you will be able to carry the burdens, the troubles and infirmities, of your neighbour, as if it were your own load. So you will fulfil Christ's law of Charity*: he bore our sins in his body on the tree* [1Pt 2.24].

We ask you then, Lord Jesus Christ, to raise us from earthly things on the wings of virtue, and to clothe us in the whiteness of purity; whereby we may bear the burdens of our brother's weakness, and come to you who bore our burdens. Grant this, you who are blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[THIRD CLAUSE]

**(The theme for a sermon on the three-fold Jerusalem, and its triple structure: *The gates of Jerusalem shall be of sapphire*.)**

15. There follows, thirdly:

*Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and his justice; and all these things shall be added unto you*. [Mt 6.33]

The kingdom of God is the supreme good: that is why it is to be sought. We seek it by faith, hope and charity. The justice of the kingdom is to keep everything that Christ taught. To seek the kingdom is to fulfil that justice in our actions. First, then, seek the kingdom of God, and set it before everything else; all else should be for its sake. We should ask for nothing beyond it, since everything we do ask for should serve it. Notice that he says, ‘shall be added’, because everything belongs to the children, and will be given them even if they do not ask. If they are taken away, it is just a test; if they are given, it is so that thanks may be given, because everything works together for their good.

There is a **concordance** about this kingdom in the book of Tobias:

*The gates of Jerusalem shall be built of sapphire, and of emerald:*

*and all the walls thereof round about of precious stones.*

*All its squares shall be paved with white and clean stones:*

*and Alleluia shall be sung in its streets.*

*Blessed be the Lord who hath exalted it:*

*and may he reign over it for ever and ever. Amen.* [Tob 13.21-23]

Note that Jerusalem is threefold: allegorically, the Church Militant; morally, the faithful soul; anagogically, the Church Triumphant. Let us deal with each of these structures.

[Allegorically.] In this text, four kinds of stone are mentioned: sapphire, emerald, precious stone and clean, white stone. By these we understand the four orders of the Church Militant: apostles, martyrs, confessors and virgins. Sapphire, like the clear blue sky, stands for the apostles who despised earthly things, and said: *Our conversation is in heaven* [Phil 3.20]. Emerald, greener than any grass, which turns green the surrounding air and the appearance of those who gaze on it, stands for the martyrs. By shedding their blood, they sprinkle the souls planted in the Church’s garden by the apostles’ labour, so that their faith remains green. The gates of the Church Militant are built from the sapphire of the apostles and the emerald of the martyrs, so that through them the entrance to the kingdom might be opened. The precious stone stands for confessors, who have set themselves up as a *wall for the house of Israel* [Ezek 13.5] against heretics. The clean, white stone represents virgins, shining with inner purity and outwardly bright as they prostrate themselves before the Lord in humility and in witness. By their example the squares, which are the faithful, are widened and paved with charity, so that they may subject themselves to the Lord.

16. Morally. Sapphire represents contempt for what is visible, and contemplation of what

is unseen. Emerald stands for compunction of tears and confession of sin. From these two the gates of the soul are built, whereby the entrance for the grace of the Holy Spirit stands open. By these two are opened the entrance and the exit through which we taste the sweetness of God, we examine ourselves, and we tread down the world. The precious stone denotes patience, the wall of the soul which fortifies and defends it against any disturbance. The clean, white stone represents chastity and humility, with which the thoughts and imaginations of the mind should be paved. Then Alleluia, the praise of God, will be sung in its streets, the bodily senses. How sweet a symphony, when clean senses and pure thoughts work together!

17. Anagogically. The sapphire stands for contemplation of the inexpressible Trinity and Unity. Emerald, which transorms the eyes, represents the joyful vision of the whole triumphant Church. The precious stone is the eternal fulfilment of heavenly joy. The clean, white stone is the glorification of the double robe of soul and body. When the saints have all these, they will sing Alleluia in the streets of Jerusalem. The streets of Jerusalem mean the mansions of which the Lord says:

*In my Father's house are many mansions*, [Jn 14. 2]

wherein Alleluia, praise and glory, is sung with unceasing voices by the saints.

Blessed is God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who has exalted the Church Militant to be the Church Triumphant, his kingdom over which he reigns for ever and ever. Amen. Of this kingdom the Gospel says: Seek first the kingdom of God.

18. To this third clause the third part of the epistle is **concordant**:

*He that soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting*. [Gal 6.8]

This is Jerusalem, built of precious stones. This is the kingdom of God, which we seek when we sow in the spirit. To sow in the spirit is to seek the kingdom of God, and thereto is added:

*And in doing good, let us not fail; for in due time we shall reap, not failing*, [Gal 6.9]

when with unceasing voice we sing Alleluia in the streets of Jerusalem.

Let us then ask the Lord Jesus Christ, brothers, to grant us to seek his kingdom, and to build in us the moral Jerusalem, whereby we may come to the heavenly one and sing Alleluia in its streets, with the holy angels. May he grant this, whose kingdom lastrs for ever and ever. Let every moral soul say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] ABBOT GUERRIC, *In dominica in ramis palmarum, serm*. 2,1; PL 185.130

[2] Quoted in PETER LOMBARD, *Sententiae* II, dist 30.8

[3] Quoted in PETER LOMBARD, *Sententiae* II, dist 30.7, from FULGENTIUS, *De fide ad Petrum* 26; PL 40.774

[4] PETER COMESTOR, *Historia Scholastica, liber Danielis* 8; PL 198.1457

[5] AUGUSTINE: reference unknown

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

**(The Gospel for the sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost: *Jesus went into a city that is called Naim*; which is divided into two clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon on the penitent soul, how it should put away sin and practise works of penitence, and put on the adornment of virtue: *Judith went down into her house*.)**

1. At that time: *Jesus went into a city that is called Naim*. [Lk 7.11]

It says in the Book of Judith that

*when Judith went down into her house she took off her haircloth, and put away the garments of her widowhood. And she washed her body, and anointed herself with the best myrrh, and plaited the hair of her head, and put a bonnet upon her head, and clothed herself with the garments of gladness, and put sandals on her feet, and took her bracelets, and lilies, and earlets, and rings, and adorned herself with all her ornaments*. [Jdth 10.2-3]

Judith means ‘confessing’, and she stands for the faithful soul which should confess to the Lord, with the confession of sin and of praise. She goes down into her house when, returning to her proper conscience, she recollects her evil deeds *in bitterness of soul* [cf. Is 38.15]. Thus the angel said to Agar, in Genesis:

*Return to thy mistress, and humble thyself under her hand*. [Gen 16.9]

Agar means ‘vulture’; she is the soul which, going out by her bodily senses to the works of the flesh, is like a vulture looking for dead bodies. The angel, the grace of the Holy Spirit, says to her: Return to thy mistress, enter into your conscience and humble yourself under the hand of reason in the bitterness of penitence.

*She took off her haircloth*. Haircloth denotes the stench of sin, and the soul takes it off when she goes down into her own conscience and thinks about what she has done and left undone. So the Psalm says:

*I meditated in the night with my own heart:*

*and I was exercised, and I swept my spirit*. [Ps 76.7]

Note the three words, ‘meditate’, ‘exercise’ and ‘sweep’. The sinner, living in the night of sin, should meditate in his heart on what he has committed, what he has lost and gained. He has committed his soul to death, he has lost glory and gained hell. For these reasons he should exercise himself in contrition and bitterness of heart, and sweep away and cleanse the filth of sin in oral confession.

*She put away the garments of her widowhood*. This garment would have extended to her feet; being a widow, she lived alone and retained no conjugal rights in a husband’s companionship. The ‘garment of widowhood’ is mortal sin, and when the soul puts it on she is widowed from her true spouse. She puts it off when she puts off sin and its circumstances in confession. So the Lord says through Baruch in Jeremiah:

*Put off, O Jerusalem, the garment of mourning and affliction:*

*and put on the beauty and honour of that everlasting glory which thou has from God*. [Bar 5.1]

The ‘garment of mourning and affliction’ is sin, wherein there is mourning and affliction. Mourning is like a wound or ulcer in the human heart, to which comfort must be applied for its healing. Just as a wound or ulcer afflicts the body, so does sin afflict the soul to whom is said: O Jerusalem, put off in confession the garment of your mourning and affliction; and put on the beauty of virtue, and the honour of glory, a pure conscience, so that you may attain everlasting glory.

*And she washed her body*. She washed the works of the flesh with the tears of penitence. So the Lord said to Moses in Exodus:

*Go to the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow; and let them wash their garments.*

*And let them be ready against the third day*. [Ex 19.10]

There are three days: contrition, confession and satisfaction. Today and tomorrow, that is, by contrition and confession, we must sanctify ourselves, and with tears wash our clothes, the works of the flesh. Then we shall be ready for the third day, to make satisfaction.

*And she anointed herself with the best myrrh*, that is, with mortification of the flesh, so as to kill the worms of concupiscence. So it says in John that Nicodemus came,

*bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. They (i.e. he and Joseph) took therefore the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths, with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury*. [Jn 19.39-40]

Nicodemus is ‘enclosing judgement’, and he stands for the vehement spirit of contrition, which shuts up the bodily senses under the judgement of discretion, so that they do not run about the meadows of captivating pleasure. He bears a mixture of myrrh and aloes, the mortification of mind and of body, in which is comprised all human perfection, and this weighs about a hundred pounds. Joseph means ‘application’, and he stands for confession, which should be applied to the spirit of contrition. These two bury the just man in the tomb of a new way of life, binding him with the cloths of a clean conscience and with spices of good repute. This is the way the Jews (true penitents) bury.

There follows: *and she plaited the hair of her head*; that is, with skill and judgement she separated out each thought of her mind. The Lord says in Jeremiah:

*If thou wilt separate the precious from the vile, thou wilt be as my mouth.* [Jer 15.19]

What is precious must be distinguished from what is worthless. One is rare, the other is common and uncouth. If you separate the precious from the vile- that is, pure thoughts, which are rare, from impure fleshly ones- you will be as my mouth, speaking of heavenly, not earthly, things

*And she put a bonnet upon her head*. Ecclesiasticus says:

*A crown of gold upon* (Aaron’s) *mitre, wherein was engraved Holiness,*

*an ornament of honour, a work of power*. [Ecclus 45.14]

In Exodus, the Lord said to Moses:

*Thou shalt make also a plate of the purest gold, wherein thou shalt grave with engraver’s work: Holy to the Lord. And thou shalt tie it with a violet fillet, and it shall be upon the mitre, hanging over the forehead of the high priest*. [Ex 28.36-38]

The head is the mind, and the mitre on the head is the firm intention of the mind to do good. The gold plate on the mitre is patience (which is golden), and on it is engraved "Holy to the Lord": that is, the Tetragrammaton, IHVH. This means that the principle of life is the Passion, as if Aaron should say, "The One I prefigure is the origin of the life Adam lost; but it will be restored by His Passion." The gold plate of patience is inscribed with the name of the Lord’s Passion, the glory of our honour and the work of our power.

*And she clothed herself with the garments of gladness*, which are works of charity. So the Psalm says: *Glad is the man that sheweth mercy and lendeth...* [Ps 111.5].

*And she put sandals on her feet*; that is, she held together her works with the Gospel precepts. That is the meaning of the Apostles being *shod with sandals* in Mark [6.9], whereon the Gloss comments that "sandals are worn so that the foot is neither covered nor naked to the earth; that is, so that the Gospel is neither hidden, nor hindered by earthly concerns."

*And she took her bracelets*, the reward of the right hand, which is eternal life. In John it says: *Cast the net on the right side of the ship; and you shall find* [Jn 21.6]. The left hand stands for loss, being 'left outside'. Whatever you do for this world's sake, you will have to leave behind and lose. It is on your right hand that you will find, and gain more. If you work for eternal life, grace will be given you from the secret treasury of life which is set before you, and thereby you may return to the land.

*And she took lilies*, chastity and purity, of which Canticles says:

*My beloved... feedeth among the lilies*. [Cant 2.16]

The Virgin Mary's Son rests and takes his delight among the lilies of two-fold continence.

*And earlets,* devoted obedience; whence it says in Job that

*Every man gave him one ewe and one earring of gold*. [Job 42.11]

The ewe represents innocence, and the earring obedience, that is, hearing adorned with the grace of humility. Notice how in this text a sheep is offered with an earring, and an earring with a sheep. The Lord bears witness that the adornment of obedience is conjoined with innocence of mind, when he says: *My sheep hear my voice* [Jn 10.27]. He says 'sheep', not 'wolves'. Whoever does not listen to the voice of his superior is like a wolf, not a sheep. We are told that a gold earring is offered, because obedience should be shown from love, not from fear.

*And rings*, the sign of formed faith. In Luke, the Father says regarding the prodigal son, *Put a ring on his hand* [Lk 15.22]. The ring on the hand stands for faith shown in action; so that faith shines out in action, and action is strengthened by faith.

*And she adorned herself with all her ornaments*, all the other virtues with which the soul is adorned. The Psalm says of these:

*The queen stood on thy right hand, in gilded clothing:*

*surrounded with variety*. [Ps 44.10]

All these things should belong to the man the Lord raises like the widow's son, and

restores to his mother, the heavenly Jerusalem. This is why it says in today's Gospel, Jesus went into a city that is called Naim.

2. There are two points to note in this Gospel: Jesus Christ's drawing near to the gate of the city of Naim; and the raising of the dead man, the widow's son. The first begins : *Jesus went*; the second: *Whom when the Lord had seen, being moved with mercy towards her*. This Sunday and during the week the Books of Judith and Esther are read, from which we will choose various texts and **concord** them with the clauses of the Gospel.

In the Introit of today's Mass we sing: *Thou art just, O Lord*; and the Epistle is from blessed Paul to the Ephesians: *Wherefore I pray you not to faint at my tribulations for you*; which we will divide into two parts and **concord** with the two clauses of the Gospel: the first part: *I pray you*; the second part: *Rooted and founded in charity*. This Epistle and Gospel go together, because the Gospel tells how Christ raised the widow's son, while in the Epistle Paul tells how Christ dwells by faith in our hearts, to raise the inward man from sin.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(How mortal sin is recognised: *In each of us*.)**

3. Let us say, then:

*Jesus went into a city that is called Naim; and there went with him his disciples and a great multitude. And when he came nigh the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a great multitude of the city was with her*. [Lk 7.11-12]

The Gloss briefly summarises this Gospel thus: "When the Word-made-flesh was leading the Gentile people through the gates of faith to the heavenly Jerusalem, behold, the younger Jewish people which was dead through lack of faith was being carried out. Mother Church owned that people as her own in the world, and accompanied by many crowds of peoples wept with loving affection and laboured to recall it to life with devout tears. She obtains this both in the few Jews who are converted at the moment, and the fullness in the end." "The bier that is carried out is the human body; the bearers are evil habits, which drag that body towards death. But Jesus touches the bier when he raises our frail nature upon the wood of the Cross; then the bearers stand still, because they are unable to drag to death as they did before. Then Jesus speaks, imparting his saving counsel, and when he hears the word the dead man returns to life and is restored to his mother by good deeds."

Consider, and pay careful attention, to how appropriately and excellently the story of Judith is concordant with this Sunday's Gospel. There are three things to notice particularly in the Gospel: the city of Naim, the widow's son who was dead there, and the

widow herself. Similarly, in this Sunday's history there are three features: the city of Bethulia, the people there who were afflicted by thirst and almost dead, and the widow Judith herself. The Lord, moved to mercy by the widow's prayers, raised her son to life; and he freed the people of Bethulia from the besieging enemy by the tears and prayer of the widow Judith. What all these things mean from a moral point of view, let us see.

The city of Naim and the city of Bethulia stand for the same thing. Naim means 'movement', or 'tossing of the waves'; Bethulia is 'sorrowing house' or 'house of one giving birth'. They represent our body, disturbed by instinctive movements, the waves of evil thoughts, the sorrow of tribulation, the groans and tears of childbirth. We will treat of these four things.

4. Note[1] that "in each of us nothing else takes place when anyone falls into sin, than happened in those three, to whit the serpent, the woman and the man. First comes temptation, either by thought or by bodily sense. When this suggestion is made, if our desire is not moved to sin, the serpent's guile is thwarted. But if it is moved, it is as when the woman was beguiled. Sometimes, reason acts firmly and restrains and curbs the desire that has been aroused. When that happens, we do not fall into sin, but with some struggle we are crowned. But if reason consents, and decides to carry out what lust is urging, man is cast out from all life's happiness, as though from paradise. He is already guilty of sin, even if the deed does not follow, because guilt is reckoned to lie in the consent of the will." A further enquiry is needed to distinguish mortal and venial sin in the soul. "If sin is not long held with pleasurable thought, but as soon as the sensual motion touches the woman (the lower part of reason) it is driven of by the authority of the man (reason), it is venial." "And so pardon is to be sought for such thoughts, and we should beat our breasts and say: Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors [Mt 6.12]" "But if even thought alone should dwell for long on unlawful pleasures, from which it should turn away at once, even without deciding to do evil, but only thinking about them and taking pleasure therein, it is a mortal sin; and if it is not repented, a man will be damned." Genesis recounts that Noah begot Ham, and Ham begot Canaan, of whom was said: Cursed be the boy Canaan; *a servant of servants he shall be unto his brethren* [Gen 9.25]. Noah means 'rest', Ham means 'heat', Canaan is 'disturbance'. From 'rest', meaning lukewarmness and idleness, arises the heat of desire. From the heat of desire come the movements of our wretched flesh. Cursed be the boy Canaan, cursed the movements of the flesh, which we must subdue and reduce to servitude.

Again, Isaiah says of the flood of evil thoughts:

*The heart of the wicked is like the raging sea which cannot rest:*

*and the waves thereof cast up dirt and mire*. [Is 57.20]

And:

*There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord.* [Is 57.21]

The heart of the wicked is like the raging sea, swelling with pride and boiling with lust; and so the waves of evil thoughts cast up dirt and mire. They produce two evils: they assail grace and throw up the mire of sin.

Of the sorrow of tribulation, the Psalm says:

*I met with trouble and sorrow*. [Ps 114.3]

When Adam was cast out of paradise, he found the thorns of sorrow in his heart, and the thistles of tribulation in his body; as was said: *Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee* [Gen 3.18].

Thorns pierce, as sharp as spears; thistles are troublesome weeds. The thorns of sorrow pierce the mind, while the thistles of tribulation trouble the body, so that it brings forth tears and groans. There you have the city of Naim, there is the city of Bethulia, where the only son dies and the people are afflicted. The son and the people stand for the human soul, which is afflicted by the temptation and assault of unseen enemies. When it surrenders to them, it dies miserably in its very body. So we must say: Behold, a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother.

A dead man has fulfilled the business of life, ended life itself; he is 'defunct', having ceased or ended his function. The dead man who is carried out of the gate in the presence of a crowd represents a wicked sinner who does not hide his sin in the chamber of his heart, but flaunts it by word and deed, as by the gates of his soul's city, in the sight of others. The gate whereby the dead man is carried out is any of the senses whereby someone falls into sin, and principally the sense of sight. By these portals, we import and export. By the eyes, we *go out to look at the women of the country* [cf. Gen 34.1], false delights; and by them death enters to kill our virtues.

**(The four gates of our body: *Each by their troops*.)**

5. Note that the city of Naim (our body) has four gates- east, west, south and north- whereby the dead soul may be carried out. To prevent it from being carried out, the gates should be strengthened with bolts and guards. The Lord said to Moses, according to the Book of Numbers:

*All the children of Israel shall camp by their troops, round about the tabernacle. On the east Juda shall pitch his tents... and next to him Issachar and Zabulon. On the south side Ruben, Simeon and Gad; on the west side Ephraim, Manasses and Benjamin; to the north Dan, Aser and Nephtali*. [cf. Num 2.2-5,10-14,18-22,25-29]

The tabernacle is the body: as Peter says:

*I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in*

*remembrance; being assured that the laying away of this my tabernacle (body) is at hand.* [1Pt 1.13-14]

The four gates of the city, or the four sides of this tabernacle, are sight, hearing, taste and touch.

**(On sight: *As the east to the world*.)**

The east stands for sight, because the eyes light up the whole body, as the east does to the world. Judah, Issachar and Zabulon must be set to guard them. Judah, who merited the leadership because he was first to enter the Red Sea, and from whose tribe came David and Christ, represents the regal nature of the soul, which restrains all indecent and unlawful wandering; and like a lion fears no assault of temptation. Issachar (‘reward’) stands for the reward to come in eternity. Zabulon (‘dwelling of strength’) stands for a firm intention of final perseverance. Of these two, Moses says in Deuteronomy:

*Rejoice, O Zabulon, in thy going out; and Issachar in thy tabernacles*. [Dt 33.18]

Whoever perseveres to the end in the Lord will truly rejoice, because he will pass to the tabernacle of eternal reward. If these three, namely the regality of the soul, the hope of eternal reward, and unshakeable perseverance to the end, come together in one, they will defend the eyes against any unlawful sight. It is beneath royalty to gaze on what is base; the hope of an invisible reward withdraws the eyes from what is visible; an intention to persevere bars the infection of sin, which when it enters by the eye weakens the intention of the mind.

**(On hearing: *The south is called*.)**

The south stands for hearing. It is named (in many languages) after the mid-day, the time of greater brightness. Hearing stands between sight and taste. I can see further than I can hear; but I can hear distant things which I cannot taste. Taste, hearing and sight are like positive, comparative and superlative. So Ruben, Simeon and Gad must pitch their tents in hearing. Moses said of Ruben in Deuteronomy:

*Let Ruben live, and not die: and be he small in number*. [Dt 33.6]

This stands for humility- "When you were small in your own eyes, you became great in mine" [cf. 1Kg(Sm) 17.17]. Simeon means ‘hearing sorrow or sadness’; Gad means ‘girded’. There are three things that hinder our hearing- words of pride, of detraction and of flattery. Against words of pride, be ready by humility and patience. "Patience is the best way of overcoming", says a Philosopher.[2] Against detractors, be one who hears sorrow and sadness; as Solomon says in Proverbs:

*The north wind driveth away rain, as doth a sad countenance a backbiting tongue*. [Prov 25.23]

You will be girded against flatterers if you remember your own wickedness, believing the testimony of your own conscience more than another's tongue.

**(On taste: *The west is called,* and on the nature of serpents.)**

The west stands for taste, and is called the 'occident', the place of sunset. It hides the light from the world, and brings on darkness. We sin in three ways by our tongue: by flattery, by detraction, and by taking more food and drink than we need. We flatter people to their faces, speak against them behind their backs, are slaves to the pleasures of gluttony: and so the sun of justice sets in us, and the darkness of ignorance falls upon us. Here Ephraim must encamp (meaning 'growing'), with Manasses ('forgotten') and Benjamin ('son of bitterness'). When you try to magnify and extol another with your praise, you diminish yourself. hear what Joseph said when Ephraim was born to him:

*God hath made me to grow in the land of my poverty.* [Gen 41.52]

Of my poverty, he said, not of my flattery. Do you want to grow to God rather than to men? Give all glory and praise to the Creator, not to the creature. Do you want to avoid detraction? Be Manasses, forgetting every grudge and envy of heart. When you speak, say nothing but good of those who are absent. Any absentee whom you do not truly and purely love, I beg you, brother: forget when you speak, so as to say with Joseph, when Manasses was born:

*God hath made me to forget all my labours, and my father's house.* [Gen 41.51]

A great labour it is, to injure another's life with the tongue of detraction, do do him ill and add to his burdens. As the Psalmist says:

*Under his tongue are labour and sorrow*, [Ps 9B.7]

and Jeremiah:

*They have bent their tongue, as a bow, for lies and not for truth*. [Jer 9.3]

The word means 'stretched out', and Natural History tells that the serpent stretches out his tongue cunningly, having in it two prongs. First it bites with its teeth, then it fixes those prongs in the wound, and makes a moist venom enter the wound, thus poisoning the man. Serpents crawl, and represent detractors who criticise in secret. The detractor's tongue is forked; he speaks ill of the one he hates, or if he is afraid, or is not believed, he praises sarcastically: "A fine fellow", he says, "quite faultless!" He bites with the tongue of detraction and injects the poison of a twisted mind.

Again, in the face of gluttonous pleasure, be Benjamin, the son of 'bitterness', that is, of Jesus Christ's Passion. Boaz said to Ruth: *Dip thy morsel in the vinegar* [Ruth 2.14]. (On this, see the Gospel: *A blind man sat* [Quinquagesima])

**(On touch: *The north is called*.)**

The north represents touch. The north wind freezes the waters, and in the same way wickedness freezes the hands, so that they cannot stretch forth to good works. On this side Dan ('judgement') must pitch his tents, with Aser ('riches') and Nephtali ('breadth'). We sin by the touch of our hands in three ways, by indecent and shameful touching, by taking what belongs to others, and by failing to give their rights to the poor. Against the first, judge yourself; against the second, be content with what is justly yours: "Happy the lack of great riches, and to find what you have sufficient."[3] Against the third, enlarge yourself; stretch out your hand to the poor, to receive double from the hand of Jesus Christ. If the gates of your body are defended with these bolts and guards, the dead man will not be carried out by the gates of the city of Naim.

**(A theme on the cunning of the devil: *While Holophernes went round*.)**

6. You have heard about the dead son: now hear about the afflicted people of Bethulia. It says in Judith that Holophernes, in going round about, found that the fountain which supplied them ran from outside the city on the south side; and *he commanded their aqueduct to be cut off* [Jdth 7.6]. Holophernes means 'one who weakens the fatted calf', and he represents the devil, who weakens the fatted calf of this world, the sinner drunk with temporal things, with the sharp fever of lust, the itch of avarice, the dizziness of pride. The devil goes round about, seeking whom he may devour, and finds the fountain. This fountain is the grace of the Holy Spirit; the aqueduct is the devotion of the mind; and the south side is faith in Jesus Christ: *God will come from the south* [Hab 3.3]. The city is the soul. The fountain of grace enters the city of the faithful soul by the channel of devotion, from the 'south' of the Lord's Incarnation. The devil, when he finds it, blocks the mind's channel with worldly care, and so the soul, which formerly drew water with joy from the Saviour's fountains, becomes parched with thirst, empty of grace and on the point of death.

When the soul considers how this has come about by God's just judgement and her own deserts, she cries with the people of Bethulia in the words of today's Introit:

*Thou art Just, O Lord: and thy judgement is right;*

*deal with thy servant according to thy mercy.* [Ps 118.137,124]

The same is read in the Book of Judith, where it says that

*there was a great weeping and lamentation of all in the assembly. And for many hours*

*with one voice they cried to God, saying: We have sinned with our fathers, we have done unjustly, we have committed iniquity. Have thou mercy on us, because thou art good*. [Jud 7.18-20]

7. The first part of today's Epistle is **concordant** with this first clause:

*I pray you not to faint at my tribulations for you, which is your glory*. [Eph 3.13]

This was Holophernes' intention, as he beset the people of Bethulia, that they should faint in their tribulations and yield him the city. In the same way the devil troubles the soul, that it may faint and so fall. But, I pray you not to faint at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. Judith says:

*Our father Abraham was tempted,*

*and being proved by many tribulations was made the friend of God*. [Jud 8.22]

*For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named; that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened by his spirit with might unto the inward man; that Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts*. [Eph 3.14-17]

The same may be read in the Book of Judith, where it tells how,

*falling down prostrate before the Lord, she cried to the Lord, saying: O Lord God of my father, O God of the heavens, creator of the waters, and Lord of the whole creation: hear me, a poor wretch, making supplication unto thee, and presuming on thy mercy. Remember, O Lord, thy covenant, and put thou words in my mouth, and strengthen the resolution of my heart; that thy house* (that is, the Church) *may continue in thy holiness*. [Jud 9.1-2,17-18]

This is what the Apostle means by "Christ dwelling by faith in your hearts".

Let us humbly pray him, then, dearest brothers, to strengthen the gates of our city with the aforesaid guards, and keep the fountain of living water, lest it be cut off by Holophernes; and may he dwell in our hearts, so that we may be found fit to dwell with him in heaven. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[SECOND CLAUSE]

**(A theme for a sermon on the mercy of God, which consists in his Incarnation and Passion; and on the nature of the cypress-tree: *When Assuerus saw Esther*.)**

8. There follows, secondly:

*And she was a widow; and a great multitude of the city was with her. Whom when the Lord had seen, being moved with mercy towards her, he said: Weep not. And he came near and touched the bier. And they that carried it stood still. And he said: Young man, I say to thee, arise. And he that was dead sat up and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother*. [Lk 7.12-15]

The Gloss comments: "First he is moved with mercy, an example of goodness for us to imitate; then he raises to life, building up a faith of wonderful power." There is a **concordance** to both in the Book of Esther. First:

*When Assuerus saw Esther the queen standing, she pleased his eyes, and he held out toward her the golden sceptre which he held in his hand. And she drew near, and kissed the top of his sceptre*. [Esth 5.2]

The sceptre was the symbol of pardon. Assuerus means ‘blessedness’, and he represents Jesus Christ, the blessedness of the saints. When he sees Esther (‘hidden’, a reference to the soul which should hide from the devil’s face in the wounded side of Christ) standing there- not faltering under adversity, nor bending down to earthly desires, nor sitting in idleness, nor lying on a bed of pleasure- she pleases his eyes. O blessed Jesus, blessed is the one who is pleasing in your eyes, but unhappy the one who pleases his own! Do you want to please God? First displease yourself. As Ezekiel says:

*They shall be displeased with themselves because of the evils which they have committed in all their abominations*. [Ezek 6.9]

Then you will be able to say with David: *I am well pleased with thy truth* [Ps 25.3].

Note that God’s mercy comprises two things, his Incarnation and his Passion. To humble the eyes of our pride, we should have mercy before the eyes of our mind, the Incarnation and the Passion. Solomon says in Proverbs: *Let not these things depart from thine eyes* [Prov 3.21]; and Exodus [13.7]:

*It shall be to thee as a sign and as a thing hung between thine eyes, for a remembrance*.

The analogy is with someone who ties a knot, or whatever, to stop himself forgetting.

*I am well pleased with thy truth*. The Psalm says, *In thy truth thou hast humbled me* [Ps 118.75], as if to say, when I consider the humility of Truth (your Son), I humble myself and so am pleasing to you. Or, *I am well pleased with thy truth*, in the fulfilment of your promises. Before the Lord had fulfilled his promises, man was deformed and could not please him; but after he was re-formed by the Incarnation of God’s Son, whereby the Lord’s promises were fulfilled, he was able to please him. Because Jesus Christ brought about this reformation, he himself says in Ecclesiasticus:

*I was like a cypress-tree on Mount Sion.* [Ecclus 24.17]

Natural History teaches us that the leaf of the cypress cures mange, a kind of leprosy. Christ took away the stain of corruption which reflected in our mirror, so meriting to hear, for himself and for his baptized; *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased* [Mt 3.17]. It is well said, then, that Esther was pleasing in Assuerus' eyes.

There follows: *And he held out toward her the golden sceptre*... The golden sceptre is the Cross of his Passion, whereby he gained power. So he said: *All power is given to me in heaven and in earth* [Mt 28.18]; And the Apostle: *For which cause, God also hath exalted him..* [Phil 2.9]. He extended this sceptre towards the soul, when he drew near and touched the bier. See the **concordance**! The bier is man's conscience, and when the Lord touches it with the golden sceptre of his Passion, signing it with his blood and fixing in it the remembrance of his Passion, the soul rises; and trusting in his mercy, she kisses the end of the sceptre. The end of the sceptre (the Lord's Passion) is charity, of which the Apostle says in today's Epistle:

*To know the charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge*. [Eph 3.19]

It exceeds all knowledge, and cannot be known in full. The love of Christ, who loved us to the end, is beyond human knowledge. God was made man, a just man dying for the wicked. The soul kisses the end of the sceptre when it is inseparably joined to Christ's love, and can say with the Apostle:

*Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?* [Rom 8.35]

**(The four elements and their meaning: *And they that carried it stood still*.)**

9. *And they that carried it stood still*. The sinner is 'carried' by the four elements of which he is made up. He is carried by the earth, when he thinks only of earthly things; as the Psalm says:

*They have set their eyes bowing down to the earth*. [Ps 16.11]

He is carried by water, when he thinks of lust; as Jacob said to Ruben in Genesis:

*Thou art poured out as water, grow thou not: because thou wentest up to thy father's bed, and didst defile his couch*. [Gen 49.4]

It is told that he slept with Bala, his father's concubine. He is carried by air, when he does everything for the sake of human praise. Air is less substantial than other elements, and so it represents vainglory, thin and transparent untruth. So the Psalm says:

*The sons of men are liars in the balances, to deceive*. [Ps 61.10]

"You lying hypocrite, who do you pretend to be? Why do you sell yourself to others under a false appearance, when the scales and balance of truth are weighing you? Weigh yourself in secret, and do not sell yourself to us as more than the just scales measure"[4] Finally, he is carried by fire when he is ablaze with anger. The Psalm says:

*Like wax that melteth they shall be taken away:*

*fire hath fallen on them, and they shall not see the sun.*[Ps 57.9]

When the fire of wrath falls from the devil upon the sinner's heart, he melts like wax in words of blasphemy, and is beside himself, and 'carried away'.

These four carry the soul to burial in hell, but when the Lord touches the sinner's conscience with the hand of mercy and the golden sceptre of his Passion, those four vices stand still, and the mind recalled to itself by the voice of God comes to life, and responds by obeying the Saviour. So there follows: Young man, I say to thee, arise, etc. Note the four phrases, arise, he sat up, he began to speak, and, he gave him to his mother. This is the right order of returning to life. The sinner must first arise, rising from sin by abominating it and detesting it. Then he must sit up, humbling himself in heartfelt contrition. Thirdly, he must speak in confession; and so the Lord will restore him to his mother, the grace of the Holy Spirit. There is a **concordance** to these four in the Book of Esther.

**(The abomination of sin: *Thou knowest, O Lord*.)**

10. Of the first, abomination of sin, Esther says:

*O Lord, who hast the knowledge of all things, thou knowest that I hate the glory of the wicked, and abhor the bed of the uncircumcised, and of every stranger. thou knowest my necessity; that I abominate the sign of my pride and glory, which is upon my head in the days of my public appearance, and detest it as a menstruous rag*. [Esth 14.14-16]

The soul that wants to rise from sin must in this way hate the glory of worldly things, and detest the bed of the uncircumcised (vices), and abominate the sign of pride and transitory glory, and detest it like a menstruous rag.

**(The humility of the contrite heart: *Esther had recourse to the Lord*.)**

Of the second, the humility of a contrite heart, the same Book of Esther tells how:

*Esther, fearing the danger that was at hand, had recourse to the Lord. And when she had laid away her royal apparel, she put on garments suitable for weeping and mourning. Instead of divers precious ointments, she covered her head with ashes and*

*dung: and she humbled her body with fasts. And all the places in which before she was accustomed to rejoice, she filled with her torn hair. And she prayed to the Lord the God of Israel*. [Esth 14.1-3]

In this way the soul, fearing the danger of eternal death, that threatens sinners, must fly to the Lord's mercy and put off the robes of temporal glory, putting on the weeping and mourning of repentance; for the various ointments of fleshly delights, she should sprinkle upon her head (her mind) the ashes of the remembrance of her frailty, and the dung of the recollection of her own wickedness. She should humble her body with fasts, and all the places where she used to take pleasure she should fill with her torn hair, so that she may offer for herself as many sacrifices as there were occasions of idle pleasure.

**(Confession: *Lord God, King*.)**

Again, regarding confession, Mardochaeus says in the same Book:

*And now, O Lord, O king, hear my supplication, and be merciful to thy lot and inheritance*. [Esth 13.15,17]

And Esther says:

*O my Lord, who alone art our king, help me a desolate woman,*

*and who have no other helper but thee*. [Esth 14.3]

Mardochaeus means 'bitter contrition', from which comes true confession, asking for pardon and turning the grief of penance into the gladness of glory.

**(The restoration of the penitent: *The man the king would honour*.)**

11. The same Book of Esther tells how the Lord restores the penitent to grace:

*The man whom the king desireth to honour ought to be clothed with the king's apparel, and to be set upon the horse that the king rideth upon, and to have the royal crown upon his head. And let the first of the king's princes and nobles hold his horse. And going through the street of the city proclaim before him and say: Thus shall he be honoured, whom the king hath a mind to honour*. [Esth 6.7-9]

All this, king Assuerus ordered to be done to Mardochaeus. Let us see what is meant by the king's apparel, the horse and saddle of the king, the royal crown and the first of the king's princes.

Robes indicate the proper status of a man. The king is Christ, and his robes are the virtues with which he clothes the soul that is converted to him. So it says in Ezekiel:

*I washed thee with water and cleansed away thy blood from thee: and I anointed thee with oil. And I clothed thee with embroidery and shod thee with violet-coloured shoes: and I girded thee about with fine linen and clothed thee in fine garments. I decked thee also with ornaments*. [Ezek 16.9-11]

The blood, said to be sweet, stands for the uncleanness of lust, which is delightful to a man at first, but turns to ashes in his mouth- or rather, to the burning coals of hell. The Lord washes and cleanses this blood from the soul with the water of compunction; and he anoints it with the oil of fatherly consolation, and clothes it with the embroidery of many virtues, and puts on it the sky-blue shoes of eternal longing, to tread down serpents and scorpions. He girds it with the fine linen of chastity, and the fine garments of simplicity and purity of mind. He adorns it with the ornament of decency. The soul, thus clad, can be set upon the horse on which the king rides.

The horse is the body. Its saddle is the humility, or poverty, of Jesus Christ. He sat on it when he humbled himself in flesh. The body that lives in humility and poverty may well be called ‘that on which the king rode’. The soul is set upon this horse, when flesh is subdued to spirit; and then it is crowned with the royal diadem of love for God and neighbour.

*The first of the king’s princes*, etc. Note that God has set three princes over man, to guard him, namely reason, understanding and memory. The first of these, reason, must hold the horse, lest the body run here and there; and it must lead it through the street of the city, fraternal concord, so that it does not stray. O dearly beloved! Thus is honoured the one whom the king, Jesus Christ, wishes to honour! Whoever aspires to be honoured in this way must first arise, the sit up, then begin to speak, and so be restored with honour to his mother, the grace of the Holy Spirit; that hereafter he may have a share in eternal glory.

**(Breadth, length, height and depth, and their meaning: *Rooted in charity*.)**

12. The second part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this second clause:

*That being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth*. [Eph 3.17-18]

Note that these four are **concordant** with the four just mentioned: arise, sat up, began to speak, and gave to his mother. When one arise from the straits of sin, one comes to a wideness of mind; as the Psalm says:

*And he brought me forth into a large place:*

*he saved me, because he was well pleased with me*. [Ps 17.20]

The Lord said to his disciples, regarding Lazarus, *Loose him, and let him go* [Jn11.44]. When someone rises from the stink of sin, he goes free.

In the humility of a contrite heart, there is length, regarding past, present and future. The past, to be wept over; the present, to attend to one's wretchedness; the future, to take care of oneself.

In confession there is height. High and sublime, beyond the threshold of our life, whereby we go in and go out. There is wretchedness in our entrance, anguish in our exit. Confession raises us on high, lifting us from our misery and freeing us from anguish. Confession set the thief on high, freeing him from misery and pain, as he merited to hear the words: *Today thou shalt be with me in paradise* [Lk 23.43], where there is no misery, but all glory; no anguish, but every joy.

Finally, in the restoration of the converted sinner to his mother, there is the depth of divine mercy. O depth of divine clemency, that human intelligence cannot fathom, because his mercies are countless! Though, as the Book of Wisdom says*, "God has ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight*" [Wisd 11.21], he has not included his mercy in these laws, these bounds. It includes and surrounds them all. His mercy is everywhere, even in hell, because he does not punish as much as the guilty deserve. The earth is full of the Lord's mercy, and of his fullness we wretches have all received. By God's mercy I am what I am, without it I am nothing. O Lord, if you take away your mercy, I fall into eternal misery. Your mercy is the pillar of heaven and earth, and if you take it away they all collapse. But, as Jeremiah says, *it is by the mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed* [Lam 3.22]- the many mercies, many indeed! However often we sin mortally, in mind or body, and are not immediately throttled by the devil, we should reckon it every time to be due to the infinite mercy of God. He waits for us to be converted, and so he does not let the devil throttle us. We should give thanks to the merciful Father for so many mercies, as often as we have sinned and not been consumed. Wretches that we are, why are we ungrateful for so much mercy? Job says:

*God hath given him place for penance: and he abuseth it unto pride*, [Job 25.23]

and he *treasures up wrath for himself in the day of wrath* [cf. Rom 2.5]. Have mercy on your own soul, because God's mercies are from of old, and he will not forget to show mercy on one who will let him.

These four- breadth, length, height and depth- can be made **concordant** (though in reverse order), with four phrases at the end of the Gospel:

*And there came a great fear upon them all*;

here we see the depth of fear;

*and they glorified God*,

this is the height of devotion;

*saying: A great prophet is risen up among us*;

this is the length of the acceptable time, from when he arose from his Father's side and came in the fulness of time;

*and God hath visited his people*; [Lk 7.16]

the breadth of love whereby he has deigned to visit the world.

So, dearest brethren, let us ask the Lord Jesus Christ himself to make us rise from sin, to sit in contrition of heart, and to confess our sins; so that we may be restored to our mother grace, and be led by the hands of the angels to the Jerusalem above, which is our mother. May he grant this, who is good and kind, merciful and gentle, worthy of praise and glory for ever and ever. Let every risen soul say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] This paragraph draws on P. LOMBARD, Sent II, d24,12; from AUGUSTINE*, De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, II,14,21; PL 34.207

[2] PUBLIUS SYRUS, *Sententiae*, 106

[3] SENECA, *Epistola* 2

[4] cf. BERNARD, *In Cantica sermo* 42.8; PL 183.991

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY OCTAVE

**(The Gospel for the first Sunday after the Octave of Epiphany: *There was a marriage*.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon for preachers: *A little gem of carbuncle*.)**

1. At that time: *There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee*. [Jn 2.1]

Ecclesiasticus says:

*A concert of music in a banquet of wine is as a little gem of carbuncle set in gold*. [Ecclus 32.7]

‘Carbuncle’ is a diminutive of ‘carbon’; with the words ‘little gem’, it denotes a two-fold humility. The little gem denotes transparency of reputation; the carbuncle, red as fire, is charity. It is ‘set in gold’, the wisdom of the preacher, and when it is so adorned his preaching will be like a concert of music. When outward wisdom matches that of the inner conscience, when eloquence matches life, then there is a ‘concert of music’. When words are not belied by life, sweet is the harmony.

Preaching may well be likened to music, for the nature of music is such (it is said) that if it finds a man sad it increases his sadness, if it finds him joyful it increases his joy. It is the same with preaching. When it tells of the purple-clad rich man buried in hell [Lk 16.19-22]; when it warns of the impossibility of the rich man entering heaven, any more than a camel passing through the eye of a needle [Mt 19.24]; when it tells how all worldly pomp and glory will be brought to nothing [Mk 10.25]: then it increases the sadness of the faithless, the avaricious and usurers. They are always sad, for they "gain with toil, hold with fear, and lose with grief."

*A tale told out of time is like music in mourning*. [Ecclus 22.6]

*As vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to a fool’s heart*. [Prov 25.20]

The word which bites at vice hangs heavy on the hearing of sinners, but it gladdens the

just who rejoice in the spirit, in the joy of a secure mind. Indeed, it says in Proverbs:

*A secure mind is like a continual feast*. [Prov 15.15]

The text continues: *In a banquet of wine*. This banquet of wine has the same meaning as the marriage held in Cana of Galilee, as told in today's Gospel: *There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee*.

2. In the Introit of today's Mass we sing: *Let all the earth*; and we read the Epistle to the Romans: *Having different gifts*. These are six in number, which we will **concord** briefly, as best we can, to the six water-pots.

**(On the four virtues: chastity, humility, poverty and obedience: *The mother of Jesus was there*.)**

3. *There was a marriage*. Let us see what is the moral significance of the marriage, Cana of Galilee, the mother of Jesus, his disciples, the failure of the wine, the six water pots, the water turned to wine and the steward of the feast.

Enough has been said earlier about marriage, on the Gospel: *The kingdom of heaven is like to a king that made a marriage-feast for his son* [Pentecost XX], so we will only deal briefly with the union of bridegroom and bride, the Holy Spirit and the penitent soul.

Cana means 'zeal', and Galilee 'passing across'. In the 'zeal' (that is, the love) of passing across, the marriage between the Holy Spirit and the penitent soul is made. Regarding this, there is a **concordance** in the book of Ruth. Ruth passed from the land of Moab to Bethlehem [Ru 1.6], and Boaz took her as his wife [Ru 4.13]. Ruth can mean 'seeing' or 'hastening' or 'fainting'; and she represents the penitent soul who sees her sins in contrition of heart, hastens to cleanse them in the fount of confession, and falls from her first virtue in the satisfaction of penance; as the Psalmist says:

*My flesh and my heart have fainted away*- [Ps 72.26]

meaning my carnal nature and my pride of heart. In this way she passes from the land of Moab (slavery to the devil) in the zeal of love to Bethlehem ('house of bread'). The love of God is a house of bread to the soul, which is protected and nourished by it. Then, as Bernard says, "The Holy Spirit infuses himself by the way of love."

This is Boaz (which means 'one in whom there is power'), the power to which Luke refers when he says, *Stay in the city till you be endued with power from on high* [Lk 24.49]. That soul which the Holy Spirit takes as his bride, he clothes with power from on high. So Isaiah says:

*It is he that giveth strength* (from on high) *to the weary,*

*and increaseth force and might to them that are not*. [Is 40.29]

He gives power to rise again, strength against temptation, and support to final perseverance. In the joining of the Holy Spirit and the soul a marriage is made, the marriage-bed of conscience is adorned, the table of good thoughts is set in right order, and the instrument of the five senses is tuned by the hand of discretion. From all these *the memory of the abundance of the sweetness of God is published* [cf. Ps 144.7], there is jubilation, and the Lord is truly experienced in goodness.

This is the marriage-song chanted in the Introit of today's Mass:

*Let all the earth adore thee, O God, and sing to thee:*

*let it sing a psalm to thy name, O most High*. [Ps 65.4]

'All the earth' includes east, south, west and north. Beginners are the 'east'; proficients, shining like the noon-day sun, are the 'south'; the perfect, who entirely dead to the world, are the 'west'; and the 'north' consists of good married folk, and Catholics who, though they possess worldly wealth, yet bear many trials and troubles patiently. All this earth must adore the Lord in contrition of heart, sing to him in cheerful confession, and sing a psalm by works of satisfaction: at the marriage celebrated in Cana of Galilee.

4. There follows: *And the mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited,*

*and his disciples, to the marriage*. [Jn 2.1-2]

O happy marriage, so greatly privileged, so outstandingly blessed! Blessed Mary, Virgin and mother, exemplifies chastity and fruitfulness. Jesus, humble and poor (*Learn of me, for I am meek* [Mt 11.29]; *Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air their nests, but the Son of man*, etc. [Mt 8.20]), exemplifies humility and poverty. His disciples represent obedience and patience. See, then, the grace and beauty, the privilege and dignity, of marriage!

The Spouse of the soul, the Holy Spirit, even as he unites her to himself, makes her chaste and fertile; chaste in purity of mind, fertile in the offspring of good works. Thus Canticles speaks of *all with twin offspring* (that is, with works of a two-fold love, the active and the contemplative life) *and there is none barren among them* [Cant 4.2]. On the other hand, *Cursed is the barren in Israel* [cf. Ex 23.36; Dt 7.14]; so Jeremiah says:

*The Lord hath trodden the winepress for the virgin* (i.e. barren) *daughter of Sion*. [Lam 1.15]

And so, that the soul may be able to avoid the utterance of the curse, it behoves her to be chaste and fertile, so as to say:

*I am the mother of fair love* (fertility)

*and of fear, and knowledge, and holy hope* (chastity). [Ecclus 24.24]

Again, the Holy Spirit makes the soul humble and poor, as it is said:

*To whom shall I have respect, but to him that is humble and poor and of a contrite spirit,*

*and that trembleth at my words?* [Is 66.2]

At the river Jordan, he came down upon Jesus in the likeness of a dove, a bird that is gentle, and has as it were a sigh for a song [cf. Mt 3.16]. How hard it is to preserve humility in the midst of riches! How hard to keep modesty amid pleasure; it seldom ever happens. If you find a rich man who is humble, or a 'bon viveur' who is chaste, you can reckon them to be the two lamps in the firmament! But I fear that people like that are rather to be found tinged with hypocrisy. So whoever wants to be truly humble, let him strip himself of riches; for contact with wealth only weakens humility and generates pride. So the Lord complains in Hosea:

*I have trained them and strengthened their arms:*

*and they have imagined evil against me.*

*They returned, that they might be without yoke;*

*they became like a deceitful bow*. [Hos 7.15-17]

The Lord 'trains' in those things that pertain to grace, and he 'strengthens the arms' of power and strength in those that pertain to nature, and even temporal matters. Then his children may *set themselves like a wall for the house of Israel, and stand strong in battle* [cf. Ezek 13.5]. But because iniquity proceeds from richness, 'they returned', that they might be children of Belial (whose name means 'without yoke', a reference to pride). Isaiah says:

*They have forsaken the Lord, they have blasphemed the Holy One of Israel,*

*they are gone away backwards*. [Is 1.4]

And they become 'like a deceitful bow'. Whereas they should shoot the arrows of holy life and doctrine, to strike the foe, they shoot the arrows of a perverse life and of blasphemy against the Lord.

Again, he makes the soul obedient and patient. As it is written:

*The Holy Spirit is kind, gentle, steadfast*. [cf. Wisd 7.23]

These three qualities are to be found in those who are obedient and patient. They are kind, and well-disposed to obey those who are set over them. They are gentle in putting up with, and being compassionate towards, their neighbour. They are steadfast in their intention. If you are not patient, you will never be truly obedient, for obedience is as it were widowed when not supported by patience.

**(Against the lovers of worldly joy: *Look not upon the wine*.)**

5. There follows: *And the wine failing* [Jn 2.3]

*Their wine is the gall of dragons*, meaning the joy of the world and of the flesh, of which Solomon says:

*Look not upon the wine... when the colour thereof shineth in the glass.*

*It goeth in pleasantly, but in the end it will bite like a snake,*

*and it will spread abroad poison like a basilisk*. [Prov 23.32]

Glass is of base material, fragile in substance, but it shines brightly. It represents the flesh of man, which is also of base material (being procreated from bodily fluids), fragile in substance (for *He cometh forth like a flower and is destroyed* [Job 14.2]; and *his years shall be considered as a spider* [Ps 89.9]. Isaiah says: *They have woven the webs of spiders... which shall not be for clothing* [Is 59.5-6]), and bright with the splendour of worldly beauty (of which it is said: *Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain* [Prov 31.30]). When the wine of worldly pleasure shines in this glass, do not look upon it. That is, when worldly prosperity and fleshly pleasure smile upon you, do not take delight in them. They *go in pleasantly, but in the end bite like a snake*! As the Lord says:

*Woe to you that now laugh; for you shall mourn and weep*. [Lk 6.25]

Worldly joy is a seed-ground of eternal sorrow, *and it will spread abroad poison like a basilisk*. Wine here, poison there. Towards the end of today's Gospel we read:

*Every man at first setteth forth good wine,*

*and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse*. [Jn 2.10]

The man whose taste is for what is earthy starts with the wine of worldly pleasure, but he ends up in hell drinking the poison of death, which that serpent the devil spreads upon

the souls of the damned. Alas! *How bitter shall be the drink to them that drink it!* [Is 24.9], who formerly *were drunk from the golden cup of the great harlot, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication* [cf. Apoc 17.1-2,4]. I pray, then, that the wine of worldly joy may fail at the marriage of bride and groom, so that when it does fail there may come to pass what follows: *His mother saith to him, They have no wine* [Jn 2.3].

Note that (in the Gospels of Luke and John) blessed Mary only made six utterances:

The first was: *How shall this be?* [Lk 1.34]

The second: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord*. [Lk 1.38]

The third: *My soul doth magnify the Lord*. [Lk 1.46]

The fourth: *Son, why hast thou so done with us*. [Lk 2.48]

The fifth: *They have no wine*. [Jn 2.3]

The sixth, (spoken to the servants): *Do whatever he tells you*. [Jn 2.5]

These are like the six steps of Solomon’s throne, the six leaves of the lily, the six rush-lights on the candlestick.

The first denotes her firm purpose of inviolable virginity.

The second, her outstanding obedience and humility.

The third, her joy at the blessing conferred on her.

The fourth, her care for her Son.

The fifth, her compassion.

The sixth, her certainty of her Son’s power.

**(On the six words of blessed Mary: *His mother said to them*.)**

6. There follows: *Woman, what is it to me and to thee? My hour is not yet come*. [Jn 2.4]

God, the Son of God, took from the blessed Virgin a human nature, in unity of Person. "The Father gave divinity, the mother humanity; the Father majesty, the mother weakness." From his divinity he had the power to change water into wine, to enlighten the blind, to raise the dead. From the weakness of his true humanity he had the ability to

hunger, to thirst, to be bound, spat upon and crucified. And so he says, *Woman, what is that to me and to thee?* Note those two words, 'me' and 'thee'. The 'me' reflects his divinity, the 'thee' his humanity. It was as if he would say to his mother, "You ask me for a miracle, which is possible for me from my divine nature. But it is for 'you' (my humanity which I took from you) to undergo the Passion."

This is the point of the words that follow: *My hour is not yet come*- the hour of my Passion, when *I tread the winepress alone, and my garments are as those that tread the winepress* [cf. Is 63.2-3]. *My hour is not yet come*, when Judas extends his heel upon the grape to press out the wine that *inebriates the hearts of them that seek the Lord* [cf. Ps 104.3]. *My hour is not yet come*, when the grape of humanity which I took from you is pressed in the winepress of the Cross, so that the *wine that makes glad the heart of man* may run down [cf. Ps 103.15]. When that hour does come, then *what will it be to me and to thee*, O woman?

**(On the six waterpots and their significance: *There were set there*; and on the pupil and the eyelids, and what they signify.)**

7. There follows: *There were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three measures apiece*. [Jn 2.6]

In Cana of Galilee, the soul which in the zeal of love passes from vice to virtue, there are six waterpots: contrition, confession, prayer, fasting, almsdeeds and heart-felt forgiveness of injuries received. These are what purify the Jews (penitents) from all their sins.

Contrition purifies, as the Lord says in Ezekiel:

*I will pour upon you clean water and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness*. [Ezek 36.25]

And in Jeremiah:

*Wash thy heart from wickedness, O Jerusalem, that thou mayest be saved.*

*How long shall hurtful thoughts abide in thee?* [Jer 4.14]

Contrition washes the heart from wickedness, and purifies it from hurtful thoughts, whence Leviticus:

*The entrails and the feet they shall wash with water*. [Lev 1.13]

The 'entrails' stand for unclean thoughts, the 'feet' for carnal desires, which are washed with the water of contrition.

Confession purifies; whence: "All things are washed in confession." Jeremiah says:

*Pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord*. [Lam 2.19]

Like water, not like wine, milk or honey. When wine is poured out, it leaves an odour in the jar; milk leaves a colour, and honey a taste. But when water is poured out, there remains no trace of any of these. The smell of wine represents the imagining of sin, the colour of milk is the admiration of an empty beauty, the taste of honey the remembrance of confessed sin with mental pleasure. These are the evil remnants spoken of in the Psalm:

*They are full of children* (evil deeds, the swinish filth of sin)

*and they have left to their little ones the remains* (to the first movements of sin).[Ps 16.14]

But you, when you pour out your heart in confession, pour it out like water, so that swinish things and their remains may be altogether banished, and so you will be purified from sin.

Prayer purifies; whence the Lord says in Jeremiah:

*They shall come with weeping: and I will bring them back in prayers,*

*and I will bring them through the torrents of waters*. [Jer 31.9]

And in Ecclesiasticus:

*He will not despise the prayers of the fatherless*

(meaning the humble penitent, who says: *My father and mother* (the world and carnal desire) *have left me, but the Lord hath taken me up* [Ps 26.10]),

*nor the widow* (the soul of the penitent himself) *when she poureth out her complaint.*

*Do not the widow's tears run down the cheek,*

*and her cry against him that causeth them to fall?*

*For from the cheek they go up even to heaven:*

*and the Lord that heareth will not be delighted with them.*

*He that adoreth God with joy shall be accepted:*

*and his prayer shall approach even to the clouds.*

*The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds*. [Ecclus 35.17-21]

Fasting purifies; whence Joel says:

*Be converted to me with all your heart, in fasting and in weeping and in mourning*. [Joel 2.12]

And in Matthew:

*But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face*. [Mt 6.17]

Moses, after a fast of forty days [cf. Ex 34.28; Dt 9.9] merited to receive the Law of the Lord, which is *unspotted, converting and purifying souls* [Ps 18.8]; and Elias heard the whisper of a gentle breeze [cf. 3(1)Kg 19.12]. It is said that the saliva of a fasting man is deadly to serpents. Great is the power of fasting, which cures the diseases of the soul and overcomes the deceits of the ancient enemy.

Almsgiving purifies; so:

*Give alms; and, behold, all things are clean unto you*. [Lk 11.41]

*As water quencheth a fire, so alms resisteth sins*. [Ecclus 3.33]

Of this, Ecclesiasticus says:

*The alms of a man is as a purse with him,*

*and shall preserve the grace of a man as the apple of the eye*. [Ecclus 17.18]

Alms may be called ‘a purse’, because what is placed in it is afterwards found in eternal life. Ecclesiastes says:

*Cast thy bread upon the running waters* (the poor, who go from door to door, a place to place),

*for after a long time thou shalt find it again* [Eccles 11.1] (in the day of judgement you will find a recompense for it).

Whence:

*I was hungry, and you gave me to eat*. [Mt 25.35]

You are a pilgrim, O man, so carry this purse with you on your pilgrim way, that when you arrive late at the inn, you may find in it bread to refresh yourself.

8. Alms also *preserve grace as the apple of the eye*, because for sharpness of vision the skin over the pupil is extremely thin; and the eyelids exist to protect the eyes. Every animal shuts it eye to prevent any foreign object falling into it, and this is involuntary and instinctive. A man blinks often, because the skin of his eye is thinner than that of all other animals. However, when a bird blinks, it does so with the lower eyelid. Just as the eyelid covers and protects the eye, so almsgiving covers grace, which is as it were the pupil by which the soul sees. Tobias says:

*Alms deliver from all sin, and from death,*

*and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness*. [Tob 4.11]

Just as a man instinctively blinks frequently to protect his eyes, so he should regularly give alms to preserve grace. Nature itself teaches and constrains him to do so; so Job says:

*Visiting thy beauty thou shalt not sin*. [Job 5.24]

"Your beauty, man, is your fellow man." Just as you naturally provide for yourself, so you should provide for him:

*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. [Mt 19.19]

A man should do this because his skin is thinner than that of other animals; thinness of skin here stands for compassion of mind, which is and should be greater in man than in other animals. A brute proves itself a brute because it lacks compassion. Moses says:

*The stranger and the fatherless and the widow, that are within thy gates, shall eat and be filled: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the works of thy hands that thou shalt do*. [Dt 14.29]

*I command thee to open thy hand to thy needy and poor brother, that liveth with thee in the land*. [Dt 15.11]

Forgiving injuries also purifies the soul from sin; whence the Lord says

*If you will forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your offences*. [Mt 6.14]

Someone who does this is like a bird shutting its eye with the lower lid. When a bird flies, it is not bound by any path; in the same way, one who forgives an offence does not have in his heart a path of rancour and hatred. He shuts his eye with the lower lid when he forgives an injury from his heart. This is 'spiritual almsgiving', without which all good things lack the reward of eternal life. Ecclesiasticus says:

*Forgive thy neighbour if he hath hurt thee:*

*and then shall thy sins be forgiven thee when thou prayest.*

*Man to man reserveth anger: and doth he seek remedy of God?*

*He hath no mercy on a man like himself: and doth he entreat for his own sins?*

*He that is but flesh nourisheth anger: and doth he ask pardon of God?*

*Who shall obtain pardon for his sins?...*

*Remember the fear of God: and be not angry with thy neighbour.*

*Remember the covenant of the Most High* (who said: *Forgive, and you will be forgiven* [Lk 6.37])

*and overlook the ignorance of thy neighbour.*

*Refrain from strife: and thou shalt diminish thy sins*. [Ecclus 28.2-5,8-10]

To 'overlook the ignorance of thy neighbour' is to impute his action not to malice, but to ignorance; and so to excuse it and not keep it in one's heart.

9. These, then, are the six stone water-pots, made from *the stone which the builders rejected* [Ps 117.22], the *stone cut from the mountain without hands* [Dan 2.34]. How full are they? Full to the brim, with the water of salvation. Each holds two or three measures-two, for the love of God and of neighbour; three, for the confession of the Trinitarian faith. These are necessary in all those water-pots.

The Apostle, too, sets these water-pots among the other words of today's Epistle:

*In spirit fervent* [Rom 12.11]. This refers to contrition. Just as flies will not enter a boiling pot, so the *dying flies that spoil the ointment* [Eccles 10.1] will not dare to enter a truly contrite heart.

*Rejoicing in hope*. A reference to confession, in which the sinner should rejoice in the hope of pardon, while grieving for the evil he has done.

*Instant in prayer*: the third water-pot.

*Communicating to the necessities of the saints*: fasting. It is by the ‘need’ of fasting and abstinence that the saints are *distressed, afflicted, of whom the world was not worthy* [Heb 11.37], *in labours, in watchings, in fastings* [2Cor 6.5], as the Apostle says. This can also be understood of bodily alms, but that is expressed by:

*Pursuing hospitality*: the fifth water-pot.

*Bless them that persecute you, bless and curse not*: there is the sixth water-pot, the forgiveness of injuries.

10. There follows:

*Jesus saith to them: Draw out now, and carry to the chief steward of the feast. And they carried it. And when the chief steward had tasted the water made wine*... [Jn 2.8-9]

This is **concordant** to what is said in Genesis:

*And when he had washed his face from tears, he said: Set bread on the table. And when it was set on, for Joseph apart and for his brothers apart, for the Egyptians also apart... the brothers of Joseph drank and were merry with him*. [Gen 43.31-32,34]

Joseph, *a growing son and comely to behold* [Gen 48.22], is Jesus Christ, who resembles the mustard-seed in smallness and humility, but grew into *a great tree, in whose branches the birds of the air dwell* [Mt 13.31-32], a reference to those who contemplate heavenly things. He is *beautiful above the sons of men* [Ps 44.3], and on him *the angels long to gaze* [1Pt 1.12]. He *washed his face from tears*; as Isaiah says:

*The Lord God shall wipe away the tears from every face*, [Is 25.8]

when he changes the water in those water-pots into the wine of heavenly joy. The Lord promises in St John’s Gospel:

*I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice,*

*and your joy no man shall take from you*. [Jn 16.22]

Then the heart that was formerly contrite and humble shall be glad and merry with the wine of joy; in Solomon’s words:

*The heart that knoweth bitterness.. in his joy the stranger shall not intermeddle*. [Prov 14.10]

The water of tearful confession will be changed into the wine of divine praise; as Isaiah says:

*They shall return, and shall come into Sion with praise:*

*and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.*

*They shall obtain joy and gladness: and sorrow and mourning shall flee away*, [Is 35.10] (which they had previously in the confession of their sin).

The water of tearful prayer will be changed into the joy of contemplating the Trinity and Unity; whence Isaiah says:

*They shall praise together:*

*for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall convert Sion*. [Is 52.8]

Fasting will be changed into the joy of the purified vintage. Isaiah says:

*The Lord of hosts shall make unto all the people,*

*in this mountain, a feast of fat things*, etc. [Is 25.6]

(See the Gospel: *A certain man made a great feast* [Pentecost II])

The double almsgiving (namely of temporal benefits and the forgiveness of injuries) will be changed into the joy of the double robe, the glorification of body and soul:

*They shall receive double in their land. Everlasting joy shall be unto them*. [Is 61.7]

**(On the banquet and joy of eternal life: *Joseph washed his face*.)**

11. Let us say, then: *When Joseph washed his face from tears, he said: Set bread on the table*.

This is what is said in Luke:

*I dispose of you, as my Father hath disposed to me, a kingdom: that you may eat and drink at my table, in my kingdom*. [Lk 22.29-30]

*For Joseph apart and for his brothers apart, for the Egyptians also apart*... This is what it says in Matthew:

*When the Son of man shall come in his majesty, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit upon the seat of his majesty. And all nations shall be gathered together before him; and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats*. [Mt 25.31-32]

*They drank and were merry with him*. Behold here the steward of the feast, with whom *we shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house* [Ps 35.9]. The 'chief steward' is, literally, 'chief of the three couches'. In ancient times, banquetters used to recline on three rows of couches; these may be taken to represent the three categories of married people, continents, and virgins in the Church; and their chief is Jesus, who will *make them to sit down to meat, and passing will minister to them* [Lk 12.37].

Let us humbly beg him, then, dear brothers, to grant us to celebrate the marriage at Cana of Galilee, to fill the six-water-pots with water, whereby we may merit to drink with him the wine of eternal joy at the wedding in the heavenly Jerusalem. May he grant us this, who is blessed, to be praised, and glorious for ever and ever. May every soul, bride of the Holy Spirit, say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

1 BERNARD, *De diversis sermo* 42,3; PL 183.662

2 GUIGO THE CARTHUSIAN, *Epistola ad fratres* II,3,14; PL 40.29

3 AUGUSTINE, *In Ioannis Evangelium* 9,9; PL 35.155

4 BERNARD, *In tempore Resurrectionis ad abbates, sermo* 2,10; PL 183.287

5 GREGORY, *Moralia* VI,35,54; PL 75.738

6 i.e. '*archi- tri- clinus* = chief-three-couch'

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# SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY OCTAVE

**(The Gospel for the second Sunday after the Octave of the Epiphany: *When Jesus came down*; which is divided into two clauses.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(First, the theme for a sermon against the rich and wise of this world: *It was neither herb*.)**

1. At that time: *When Jesus came down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him; and, behold, a leper came*, etc. [Mt 8.1-2]

The book of Wisdom says:

*It was neither herb, nor mollifying plaster that healed them:*

*but thy almighty word, O Lord, which healeth all things*. [Wisd 16.12]

Note these two things; 'herb' and 'mollifying plaster'. The herb stands for transitory riches, the 'plaster' or 'poultice' for worldly wisdom. The verdant grass is as the glamour of wealth, which dries up in the summer heat of death. So St James says:

*The rich shall pass away as the flower of the grass;*

*for the sun rose with a burning heat and parched the grass;*

*and the flower thereof fell off, and the beauty of the shape thereof perished.*

*So also shall the rich man fade away in his ways*. [Jas 1.10-11]

And Isaiah says:

*The reed and the bulrush shall wither away*. [Is 19.6]

The reed, hollow inside and shiny outside, is vainglory. The bulrush, soaking up water, is greed for riches. Both wither in death. Isaiah says:

*A fading flower, the glory of the joy of Ephraim*, [cf. Is 28.4]

meaning carnal folk, who say, in the book of Wisdom:

*Let not the flower of our time pass by us;*

*let us crown ourselves with roses, before they be withered.*

*Let no meadow escape our visit.* [Wisd 2.7-8]

O wretched men! What does it profit a thief to walk through green meadows, if it is to the gallows? What use was his purple and fine linen to the rich glutton, when after a little while he was buried in hell? Job says:

*I know... that the praise of the wicked is short,*

*and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment*. [Job 20.4-5]

Here is the reason why the herb of riches does not heal the soul from the sickness of sin, but rather kills it. There is no health in it, only poison which is driven out solely by the medicine of poverty.

Similarly, the plaster of worldly wisdom does not confer health, as Isaiah says:

*The wise counsellors of Pharao have given foolish counsel*. [Is 19.11]

Let not the soul of those seeking the Lord come into their counsel! [cf. Gen 49.6]. *All their wisdom has been swallowed up* [Ps 106.27], who are

*ever learning and never attaining to the knowledge of the truth*. *As Jannes and Jambres* (Pharao's wise men) *resisted Moses, so these also resist the truth, men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no farther*. [2Tim 3.7-9]

How should they confer health, who are so far from salvation? The herb of riches does not cure the leper: far worse, it makes a leper of the healthy man! The plaster of worldly wisdom does not cure the paralysed servant; far worse, it adds to his torment. As Jeremiah says:

*They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge*. [Jer 4.22]

It is your almighty word, Lord: *I will, be clean; go, be it unto you according to your faith*- which heals the leper and the centurion's paralysed servant. This is recounted in today's Gospel: *When Jesus came down from the mountain*.

2. There are two things to note in this Gospel: the cleansing of the leper and the cure of the palsied servant. The first: *When he came down*; the second: *When he had entered Capharnaum*.

In the Introit of today's Mass we sing: *Adore the Lord, all his angels*; and the Epistle to the Romans is read: *Be not wise*, which we will divide into two parts and **concord** with the two clauses of the Gospel. The first part is: *Be not wise*; the second: *If thy enemy be hungry*.

[FIRST CLAUSE]

**(Against those who are infected with the leprosy of vainglory, lust and avarice: *When there shall be a white colour*.)**

3. Let us say, then: *When Jesus came down from the mountain*.

Let us see what is meant by the mountain, and Jesus coming down. The mountain is the eternity of heavenly glory, of which the Psalm says:

*Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord?* [Ps 23.3]

He who comes down from his own dignity, and humbles himself like a little child, he it is who 'comes down from the mountain'. His coming down in the flesh was a humiliation. He 'bowed the heavens' [Ps 17.10] of his divinity and came down into the womb of his virgin mother. We have dealt with this subject in many places, and so lest wordiness induce boredom, we will not deal with it further, but proceed to the cleansing of the leper, how it happened and what it means, morally.

*And, behold, a leper came and adored him*. [Mt 8.2]

Regarding the kinds of leprosy and their meaning, see the Gospel of the ten lepers [Pentecost XIV]. This leper stands for the sinner, infected with the leprosy of mortal sin. Leviticus says:

*When there shall be a white colour in the skin,*

*and it shall have changed the look of the hair,*

*and the living flesh itself shall appear:*

*it shall be judged an inveterate leprosy, and grown into the skin*. [Lev 13.10-11]

The white colour represents pride and vainglory, the change of hair avarice, and the living flesh lust. This is 'inveterate leprosy'. The Lord says in Matthew:

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites;*

*because you are like to whited sepulchres, which outwardly to men appear beautiful,*

*but within are full of dead men's bones and of all filthiness.*

*so you also outwardly indeed appear to men just;*

*but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity*. [Mt 23.27-28]

And St Paul says in Acts:

*God shall strike thee, thou whited wall*. [Ac 23.3]

As regards the change which avarice makes, Jacob says in Genesis to Lia and Rachel:

*Your father hath over-reached me, and hath changed my wages ten times*. [Gen 31.7]

O how many times avarice changes the ‘hair’, the thoughts of the mind! Ecclesiasticus says:

*A fool is changed as the moon*, [Ecclus 27.12]

meaning the avaricious man.

"It waxes, it wanes, it never stays the same."

He has *diverse weights and diverse measures, both abominable before God* [Prov 20.10]. And so Micah says:

*As yet there is a fire in the house of the wicked,*

*the treasures of iniquity and a scant measure full of wrath.*

*Shall I justify wicked balances and the deceitful weights of the bag?* (No!)

*By which her rich men were filled with iniquity,*

*and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies:*

*and their tongue was deceitful in their mouth*. [Mic 6.10-12]

There are as many ‘consciences’ as there are tongues. This is not *the change of the right hand of the Most High* [Ps 76.11]. They are set upon the left hand, because *their right hand is filled with gifts* [Ps 25.10].

Lust arises from an excess of food and drink, which causes the living and wanton flesh to break out. With a life like that, *in thy sight no man living shall be justified* [Ps 142.2], but rather condemned. Rebecca said in Genesis:

*I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth* (‘life’).

*If Jacob takes a wife of the stock of this land, I choose not to live*. [Gen 27.46]

Jesus Christ, crucified and dead, did not take a living wife, but one crucified and dead. So the Apostle says:

*They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh, with its vices and concupiscences*. [Gal 5.24]

And also:

*I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body*. [Gal 6.17]

'Living' flesh means leprous flesh; its 'life' should rather be called 'death' than 'life'. Whoever is of this sort, if he wants to live he must come to Life, as did the leper in the Gospel, of whom it is told: *And behold, a leper came*.

**(On the three virtues, without which no-one is cleansed from the leprosy of sin: *And behold, a leper, etc*.)**

4. *And, behold, a leper came and adored him, saying:*

*Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean*. [Mt 8.2]

Note that the three words 'came', 'adore' and 'said: Lord, if thou wilt' denote contrition, confession and faith, which are very needful for every sinner. First he should 'come' by contrition: *Come from Libanus* [Cant 4.8], from the false glamour of worldly vanity. *He that heareth, let him say: Come* [Apoc 22.17]. He who hears *the whisper of a gentle breeze* [3(1)Kg 19.12] in his mind, by inward inspiration, should say to the sinner 'come', by contrition. As Isaiah says:

*If you seek, seek: return, come*. [Is 21.12]

So, *the leper came and adored him*. Behold the humility of confession, expressed more clearly by Mark, who says:

*He came to him, beseeching him; and kneeling down said to him: If thou wilt*, etc. [Mk 1.40]

In this way, the sinner, when he comes to confession, should kneel before the priest, the representative of Jesus Christ, who has given him the power of binding and loosing. The one confessing should have such faith in his office that he may say to him. *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean*, and absolve me from my sins.

There follows: *And stretching forth his hand he touched him, saying: I will, be thou made clean*. [Mt 8.3]

He speaks in the imperative mood, *his hand turned and as of gold, full of hyacinths* [Cant 5.14], and at its touch the tongue of the dumb is loosed, the ruler's daughter is raised, the leper is cleansed of his leprosy. *My hand has made all these things* [Is 66.2]. The hand bestows reward: so stretch out your hand, Lord, to bestow reward, that hand which was stretched out by the nail on the Cross. Touch the leper: whatever you touch will be cleansed and healed. Luke says:

*When he had touched his ear, he healed him*. [Lk 22.51]

He stretched out his hand and bestowed the gift of cleansing, saying:

*I will: be thou made clean. And forthwith his leprosy was cleansed*. [Mt 8.3]

*He hath done all things whatsoever he would* [Ps 113B.3]. For him, there is no gap between will and deed. Every day, the Lord does this same thing in the soul of the sinner, by the office of the priest; who should have these three things in himself, 'to stretch out', 'to touch', 'to will'. He stretches out his hand when he pours out his prayer to the Lord for the sinner, and afflicts himself out of compassion for him. He touches, when he comforts the sinner and promises him pardon. He has the will to cleanse, when he absolves him from his sins. This is the three-fold work of a shepherd, of which the Lord spoke to Peter: *Feed, feed, feed* [Jn 21.15-17].

**(On eternal life, the only reward to be expected: *See thou tell no man*.)**

5. There follows: *And Jesus saith to him: See thou tell no man*. [Mt 8.4]

This is not the manner of speaking of those who blow their own trumpet when they do anything good, whose left hand knows all too well what their right hand is doing [cf. Mt 6.3]. They as it were 'prostitute their daughter', against the prohibition of Moses, who said:

*Make not thy daughter a common strumpet*. [Lev 19.29]

Your 'daughter' is your action, and you prostitute it when you sell it to the world's brothel for the coin of vainglory. What a sad bargain, selling the reward of the heavenly kingdom for the wind of a human mouth! *See thou tell no man*: do not show what is yours to anyone. Are not God and your conscience enough for you, brother? What have you in common with the tongue of man? It condemns what it should praise. it praises what it should condemn. It casts the just man into the depths of hell, and raises the wicked to the throne of God and of the Lamb. *See thou tell no man*. So Ecclesiasticus says:

*Give no issue to thy water, no, not a little*. [Ecclus 25.34]

And Isaiah:

*My secret to myself, my secret to myself*. [Is 24.16]

And at the word of Eliseus:

*The woman went, and shut the door upon her, and upon her sons*. [4(2)Kg 4.5]

And Matthew:

*Having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret*. [Mt 6.6]

And Luke:

*Remove not from house to house*. [Lk 10.7]

So, *see thou tell no man*. Nature sets a double gate in front of the tongue, the teeth and the lips, lest the harlot who loves publicity goes out into the street, *talkative and wandering, not bearing to be quiet* [Prov 7.10-11[. Close your teeth, press your lips together, lest the harlot goes out to the brothel; as Ecclesiasticus says:

*Do not give a wicked woman liberty to gad abroad*. [Ecclus 25.34]

Then you will fulfil the command: *See thou tell no man*.

There follows: *But go, show thyself to the priests* {Mt 8.4}. These three words and their meaning are explained in the Gospel of the ten lepers: *When Jesus was going to Jerusalem* [Pentecost XIV].

**(On the two-fold offering which every penitent should make for his cleansing: *The Lord spoke to Moses*.)**

6. There follows: *And offer the gift which Moses commanded for a testimony unto them*. [Mt 8.4]

Leviticus says:

And the Lord *spoke to Moses, saying: This is the rite of a leper, when he is to be cleansed. He shall be brought to the priest: who, going out of the camp, when he shall find that the leprosy is cleansed, shall command him that is to be purified, to offer for himself two living sparrows, which it is lawful to eat, and cedar wood, and scarlet, and*

*hyssop. And he shall command one of the sparrows to be immolated in an earthen vessel over living waters. But the other that is alive he shall dip, with the cedar wood, and the scarlet and the hyssop, in the blood of the sparrow that is immolated: wherewith he shall sprinkle him that is to be cleansed seven times, that he may be rightly purified. And he shall let go the living sparrow, that it may fly into the field... And he shall take* (or offer) *two lambs without blemish, and an ewe of a year old without blemish, and three tenths of flour tempered with oil for a sacrifice, and a sextuary of oil apart... But if he be poor, and his hand cannot find the things aforesaid: he shall take a lamb for an offering for trespass, and a tenth part of flour tempered with oil for a sacrifice, and a sextuary of oil: and two turtle doves or two young pigeons, of which one may be for sin, and the other for a holocaust. And he shall offer them... to the priest, at the door of the tabernacle of the testimony before the Lord*. [Lev 14.1-7,10,21-23]

Let us see what is the moral significance of all this.

Note that there are two kinds of penitents who are cleansed from the leprosy of sin. One is in religious life, the other is in the world. Religious should make the first offering; others (married people, and Catholics whom the care of worldly affairs preoccupies, and who are not so rich in virtues) should make the second.

The ‘two living sparrows’ are the body and spirit of the religious, who can say with the Apostle: *I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me* [Gal 2.20]. He offers these sparrows to the Lord for his cleansing. So it says in Judges:

*O you that of your own good will offered yourselves to danger, bless the Lord;*

*you that ride upon fair asses, and you that sit in judgement, and walk in the way*. [Jg 5.9-10]

The ‘fair asses’ are the bodies of religious, who bear the burden and heat of the day, and who like asses should feed on raw and rough food. Ecclesiasticus says:

*Fodder and a wand and a burden are for an ass:*

*bread and correction and work for a slave*, [Ecclus 33.25]

that is, for a religious who ‘sits in judgement’ when he is under obedience to a superior, and ‘walks in the way’ Jeremiah speaks of:

*This is the good way, and walk you in it*, [Jer 6.16]

that Way who himself says: *I am the way, the truth and the life* [Jn 14.6].

He should also offer the ‘cedar wood’ of poverty, the ‘scarlet’ of charity and the ‘hyssop’

of humility. The tall cedar of poverty, whose scent puts to flight the serpents of avarice and robbery, is joined to the hyssop of humility, which drives out the swelling of the lungs by means of the scarlet of a twofold charity. One of the sparrows (that is, the body) he shall sacrifice, so as to say with the Apostle:

*The world is crucified to me, and I to the world*, [Gal 6.14]

and:

*I am even now ready to be sacrificed*. [2Tim 4.6]

‘In an earthen vessel’, for as the Apostle says:

*We have this treasure in earthen vessels*. [2Cor 4.7]

‘Over living waters’, namely compunction and tears, which are ‘living’ when they are poured out upon ‘the upper and the nether watery ground’ [Jos 15.19; Jg 1.15], of which Zechariah says:

*In that day living waters shall go out from Jerusalem* (the heart of the penitent),

*half of them to the east sea* (the ‘upper watery ground’)

*and half of them to the last sea* (the ‘nether watery ground’). [Zech 14.8]

The ‘east sea’ is bitterness for the splendour of eternal life; the ‘last sea’ is bitterness for the sins committed by oneself, for our earthly exile, and for the sins of one’s neighbour. So the religious should ‘immolate the sparrow in an earthen vessel over living waters’, by crucifying his body with its vices and desires, and pondering in bitterness of spirit the frailty of life and the downfall of our exile.

There follows: *But the other that is alive*, etc. The living sparrow is the spirit, which he should dip, along with the cedar-wood of poverty, the scarlet of charity and the hyssop of humility, in the blood of the sparrow (the body) which has been sacrificed on the altar of penitence. The affliction and discipline of the body (represented as ‘blood’) cleanses and sanctifies the spirit, so that it flies on the wings of contemplation, with those other virtues we have mentioned, to the field of heaven.

There follows: *And he shall take two lambs without blemish*, etc. The two lambs stand for meekness of soul and body; the ewe for a simple and pure intention in all one’s work; the three-tenths of flour for the threefold obedience of a superior, an equal and an inferior; and the sextuary of oil for the six works of mercy. This is the offering which every religious should offer for the cleansing of his own sin.

There follows: *But if he be poor*, etc. The lamb represents innocence of life, the tenth part of flour the perfection of eternal charity, the sextuary of oil the six works of mercy (as before), the two turtle-doves or pigeons the two-fold sighing which the sinner should emit for things done and left undone. This is the offering which married people and other good folk still living in the world should make to the Lord- namely, to live innocently, to love their neighbour, to do works of mercy and to be sorry for sins of commission and omission. So let us say: *Go, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift which Moses commanded for a testimony unto them*.

**(Against the worldly-wise: *Be not wise*.)**

7. The first part of the Epistle is **concordant** to this first clause: *Be not wise in your own conceits* [Rom 12.16]. The wisdom of the flesh is the leprosy of the soul, for : *The wisdom of the flesh is death* [Rom 8.6]. Isaiah says:

*Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, this hath deceived thee*. [Is 47.10]

And Jeremiah:

*They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge*. [Jer 4.22]

However,

*There is no wisdom, there is no prudence, there is no counsel against the Lord*, [Prov 21.30]

who, as Job says, *bringeth counsellors to a foolish end, and judges to insensibility* [Job 12.17]. So God says in the prophet Obadiah:

*I shall destroy the wise out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau*. [Ob 1.8]

Edom means ‘bloody’, and Esau ‘heap of stones’. The ‘Edomites’ are the lawyers who squeeze blood from the poor. They are *the two daughters of the horseleech* (the devil) *that say, Bring, bring... and never say, Enough* [Prov 30.15]. The ‘mount of Esau’ is the dignity of clerics, who are like a heap of stones in the Church of Christ, like milestones which point the way to others, but remain hard, senseless and immovable themselves. The Lord will destroy the wisdom of the Edomites and the understanding of those others. So: *Be not wise in your own conceits*.

There follows: *To no man rendering evil for evil* [Rom 12.17].

Here is the meekness and innocence we have just referred to regarding the lambs without blemish.

*Providing good things, not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all men*:

this is the sextuary of oil, the works of mercy.

*If it be possible, as much as is in you, have peace with all men*.

Here are the spotless ewe and the tenth part of flour, mixed with oil.

*Revenge not yourselves, my dearly beloved; but give place unto wrath*:

the young doves without gall.

*Revenge is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord*.

On the day of retribution, he will give judgement for the meek of the earth, the turtle-doves and young pigeons, the penitents and humble of Holy Church, who make the above offering for the cleansing of their leprosy.

Let us ask, then, dear brothers, the Lord Jesus Christ himself to cleanse us from the leprosy of pride and vainglory, lust and avarice, whereby we may make the prescribed offering, and, cleansed from all sin, may be found fit to be presented in the heavenly temple. He is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

**(On the second clause.**

**The theme for a sermon on the devil's strife against the just man, and on the five soldiers who defend him: *There appeared to the enemies*.)**

8. There follows, secondly:

*And when he had entered Capharnaum, there came to him a centurion, beseeching him*, etc. [Mt 8.5]

As regards the name 'Capharnaum', and its meaning, see the Gospel: *There was a certain ruler* [Pentecost XXI].The Lord would not go to the son of the ruler, lest he seem to honour wealth; but he quickly agreed to go to the centurion's servant, lest he seem to despise his lowly status. So he said*: I will come and heal him* [Mt 8.7]. Behold, our physician, who "By his word alone cures all things," and of whom Ecclesiasticus says:

*Honour the physician for the need thou hast*. [Ecclus 38.1]

*And the centurion, making answer, said: Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter*

*under my roof*, etc. [Mt 8.8]

Zacchaeus received the Lord with joy [cf. Lk 19.6]; there is a difference in attitude to be seen here. Some, out of reverence for the Body of Christ, say, "Lord, I am not worthy", and abstain from frequent reception of the Eucharist. Others, honouring the Body of Christ, receive it freely. And so Augustine says, "I neither praise nor dispraise the daily reception of the Eucharist... because it is for reverence sake that some do not dare to receive it daily, and for reverence sake that some do not dare to forgo it any day."

There follows: *But only say the word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man subject to authority, having under me soldiers; and I say to this, Go, and he goeth*, etc. [Mt 8.8-9]

From this it is proved that even without being bodily present he can tell sickness to depart and health to come, he to whom all the angels serve, obey and adore. That is why we sing in today's Introit: *Adore God, all his angels*, etc. [Ps 96.7].

*And Jesus, hearing this, marvelled; and said to them that followed him: Amen I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel;* [Mt 8.10]

that is to say, in the Israel of his time. He found it in ancient times, in the patriarchs and prophets; and we also except the blessed Virgin and the disciples, on whom a greater faith was divinely bestowed.

There follows: *And I say to you that many shall come from the east and the west*

(that is: the Gentiles, represented by the centurion, will come to the Catholic faith)

*and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*

(that is: they will take their rest with the others to be saved)

*but the children of the kingdom* (the Jews) *shall be cast out into exterior darkness;*

*there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*. [Mt 8.11-12]

Weeping because of the heat, gnashing because of the cold, because, as Job says:

*They will pass from the snow waters to excessive heat*, [Job 24.19]

for in hell there is unquenchable fire and unbearable cold, and the Lord here implies these punishments.

There follows: *And Jesus said to the centurion: Go, and as thou hast believed, so be it done to thee;* [Mt 8.13]

because each one is given what he asks, in proportion to the measure of his faith.

*And the servant was healed at the same hour*.

Your almighty word, Lord, cleansed the leper and cured the servant.

9. Morally. The centurion with soldiers under him represents the prelate, or any just man, who should be armed with virtues like soldiers. It says in the second book of Kings:

*And all the people and all the warriors walked on the right and on the left side of king David*. [2Kg(Sm) 16.6]

And again:

*And all the servants of the king walked by him, and the bands of the Cerethi* ('destroyers') *and the Phelethi* ('life-givers'). [2Kg(Sm) 15.18]

This refers to the virtues, which destroy sin and give life to the soul.

It says in the second book of Maccabees that when Judas Maccabaeus and Timotheus met in battle:

*When they were in the heat of the engagement, there appeared to the enemies from heaven five men upon horses, comely, with golden bridles, conducting the Jews: two of whom took Maccabaeus between them and covered him on every side with their arms and kept him safe: but cast darts and fireballs against the enemy, so that they fell down, being both confounded with blindness and filled with trouble*. [2Mac 10.29-30]

Timotheus' name suggests a well-doer: but he stands for the devil, who seems at the moment a benefactor to worldlings, but later on will be shown up as a poisoner. Those whom he incites to sin he will torment with punishment. When he has gathered his army of vices, he goes to war against Maccabaeus, the just man. And when the battle is hot, behold from heaven, from heavenly kindness, there appear five men, the five virtues of humility of mind, chastity of body, love of poverty, excellence in two-fold charity, and the intention of final perseverance. These ride upon the horses of good-will; (as Solomon says: *The horse is prepared for the day of battle: but the Lord giveth safety*. [Prov 21.31]) with the bridles of abstinence and discipline, golden by discretion; so leading the Jews (penitents). They bring the enemies to an end, the demons and vices, since the entry of virtue brings about the departure of vice. Humility and chastity protect and defend Maccabaeus (the just man) from elation of heart and defilement of body.

Whoever is defended by soldiers like these may well say to one (humility or patience), "Go to obedience and subjection of every kind, to bearing any injury;" and he goes. As the Philosopher says, "Patient endurance brings joy."

*The wicked have wrought upon my back*, [Ps 128.3]

that is, upon my patience. And he says to another (chastity or abstinence), "Come to restrain the greedy appetite, the lustful flesh;" and he comes. And the same is to be understood of the other virtues.

10. There follows: *And to my servant: Do this, and he does it*. [Mt 8.9]

The just man's servant is his flesh, of which Ecclesiasticus says:

*Torture and fetters are for a malicious slave: send him to work, that he be not idle;*

*for idleness hath taught much evil*. [Ecclus 33.28-29]

How happy the man who has a servant so obedient to him, that he obeys whatever he is properly commanded. Tell him to fast, and he fasts; tell him to keep vigil, and he keeps vigil; and so on. Then indeed the spiritual man says to his servant, "Do this," and he does it. The centurion's man-servant is the priest's parishioner, who is paralysed and grievously tormented. Whenever he is freed from vices and pleasures, he is violently held by the devil. The prelate who is armoured with virtue, and has manfully subdued the flesh his slave, may after the example of the centurion beg health for his man-servant.

Note that in this Gospel God's surpassing mercy, kindness and love for the leper and the palsied man is made manifest. In the same way, in the second clause of today's Epistle there is shown the mercy and love that we ought to have towards our neighbours.

*If thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat; if he thirst, give him to drink*. [Rom 12.20]

This is what Eliseus did when, as the fourth book of Kings tells us, he ordered that the enemies who had sought to capture him should be given bread and water, to eat and drink [cf. 4(2)Kg 6.22].

*For, doing this, thou shalt heap coals of fire* (of charity) *upon his head* (his mind). [Rom 12.20]

The malice of a cold heart is set alight by the fire of charity, when he who hates is loved, when he who persecutes is given gifts in return. A man is naturally ashamed not to love one who loves him, not to embrace with arms of charity whoever serves him devotedly.

Let us then, dear brothers, ask the Lord Jesus Christ to defend us with these soldiers, to cure the palsied servant, to set the cold heart on fire with charity. May he graciously grant us this, who is blessed, to be praised, and glorious for ever. Let every soul cured of its palsy say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

7 Antony is quoting a contemporary verse:

"Just like the moon, so varies fortune's game:

It waxes, it wanes, it never stays the same."

[8] ROMAN BREVIARY, Antiphon 2 at Lauds, feast of St Agatha.

[9] AUGUSTINE, *Epistola* 54,3,4; PL 33.201

[10] LUCAN, Civil War IX,403

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# THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY OCTAVE

**(The Gospel for the last Sunday: *When Jesus went up into the boat*.)**

[PROLOGUE]

**(The theme for a sermon on the preacher and the congregation of sinners: *Go up into the woodland*.)**

1. At that time: *When Jesus went up into the boat, his disciples followed him*. [Mt 8.23]

It says in the book of Joshua:

*Go up into the woodland, and cut down room for thyself in the land of the Pherezite and the Rephaim*. [Jos 17.15]

This ‘woodland’ is the barren congregation of sinners; cold, dark and full of wild beasts. It is cold from lack of charity, for *iniquity hath abounded and charity hath grown cold* [Mt 24.12]. It is dark from lack of the true light, for *men loved darkness rather than light* [Jn 3.19]. It is full of the wild beasts of gluttony and lust, of usury and rapine; for: *The boar*

*out of the wood hath laid it waste* [Ps 79.14]. In this wood is Nimrod the hunter. Both he and the boar stand for the devil.

Go up, then, into this woodland, O preacher, and with that axe whose handle is humanity and whose iron head is divinity, cut down room for yourself; for: *The axe is laid to the root* [Mt 3.10].The tree of human loftiness, the woodland of a barren and sinful congregation, will be cut down by the axe of the Lord's Incarnation. When it pays attention to the divine head bowed upon the breast of a poor Virgin, it falls from its own untouched, virgin, state and there is made a spacious place where the city of the Lord of Hosts may be built, which *the waters of a river make glad* [Ps 45.5]. This is *the change of the right hand of the Most High* [Ps 76.11], so that *where sin abounded grace may abound still more* [Rom 5.20].

It says: In the land of the Pherezite and the Rephaim. These names mean 'separated' and 'giants', or 'wanton mothers'. These three terms represent three accursed things: pride, avarice and lust. Proud souls separate themselves from others in scorn; the avaricious resemble the giants, sons of earth and devoted to what is earthly; the lustful are like wanton mothers who nourish the affections of the flesh with the two breasts of gluttony and lust.

To cut down this woodland, rooted in such a land, let the preacher go up, following the footsteps of him who went up into the boat, as today's Gospel tells: *When Jesus went up into the boat*.

[SINGLE CLAUSE]

**(On the Passion: *When Jesus went up into the boat*.)**

2. The boat is the Cross of Jesus Christ, by means of which we reach the shore of our eternal homeland. A boat is narrow at bow and stern, but wide in the middle. In the same way the Cross was constricted at beginning and end (the fastening of hands and feet with nails, and the giving up of his spirit), being full of anguish. The middle, when he prayed for his crucifiers, promised the kingdom to the thief, and commended his mother to the disciple, was as it were 'wide'. Regarding this boat, see the Gospel: *Jesus entered the boat and took ship across the sea*, etc. [Pentecost XIX].

*His disciples followed him*. This is what the Lord says in Jeremiah:

*Thou shalt call me father, and shalt not cease to walk after me*. [Jer 3.19]

Blessed is that soul which can say to Jesus what Ruth said to Naomi:

*Whithersoever thou shalt go, I will go;*

*and where thou shalt dwell, I also will dwell*. [Ru 1.16]

And Elias:

*If the Lord be God, follow him*. [3(1)Kg 18.21]

Truly, he is the Lord our God, who ascended the Cross to redeem us. Let us follow him, then, bearing the cross of penance. He says: *If any man would follow me*, etc. [Mt 16.24]. The Natural History tells us that the female leopard has a sweet scent, which wonderfully affects cattle. Whenever they get her scent, they hasten together and follow her. The alabaster jar of ointment has been broken on the Cross, and it has filled the whole world with its fragrance [cf. Mk 14.3; Jn 12.3]. Let the disciples follow, then. Let Christians run in the fragrance of the Crucified.

*His disciples followed him*. It says in the fourth book of Kings that

*when the sons of the prophets were cutting wood, it happened that the iron axe-head of one of them fell in the water. He cried out to Eliseus, saying: Alas, my lord, for this same was borrowed. Eliseus replied: Where did it fall? and he showed him the place. Then he took some wood and threw it in, and the iron floated. He said: Take it up; and he put out his hand and took it* [cf. 4(2)Kg 6.4-7].

The iron stands for the human race, which by the weight of sin became separated from the wood and fell into the waters of sorrow and guilt. Christ the true Eliseus freed it by the wood of the Cross and the waters of Baptism. The iron floats to the wood, when the converted sinner subjects himself to carry the Cross of Christ.

There follows: *And behold a great tempest arose in the sea, so that the boat was covered with waves; but he was asleep*. [Mt 8.24]

When Jesus slept on the Cross in the sleep of death, his disciples, who reckoned nothing of the Cross, fell from the firmness of faith; but they roused him, when they sought the Resurrection.

*He upbraided them with their incredulity, saying: O foolish and slow of heart to believe... Ought not Christ to have suffered these things?* [Mk 16.14; Lk 24.25-26]

He ‘commanded the winds and the sea’ when unbelief ceased.

**(On the devil’s temptation and the succour of Jesus Christ: "When anyone boards the boat of penance".**

3. Morally. When anyone boards the boat of penance, a great storm arises in the sea. The sea is the heart; Jeremiah says:

*The heart of man is deep and unsearchable. Who can know it?* [Jer 17.9]

*Wonderful are the surgings of the sea* [Ps 92.4], when it is tossed high by pride, and bursts its bounds by ambition; when it is overclouded by sorrow, troubled by vain thoughts, and foaming with lust and gluttony. These are the *creeping things without number* [Ps 103.25].

Behold, a great tempest arose in the sea. There is a **concordance** in the prophet Jonah:

*The Lord sent* (i.e. allowed to be sent) *a great wind into the sea: and a great tempest was raised in the sea, and the ship was in danger to be broken. And they were greatly afraid, and the sea tossed and swelled upon them*. [Jon 1.4,10,13]

Similarly, in the Acts of the Apostles, Luke says:

*There arose against the ship a tempestuous wind, called Euraquilo. And when the ship was caught and could not bear up against the wind, giving up the ship to the winds, we were driven*. [Ac 27.14-15]

Only those who embark on the boat of penance feel the movement of the sea, the blast of the wind and the roaring of the waves. Those who oppose it, feel it. As Moses says in Exodus:

*Since the time that I went in to Pharao to speak in thy name, he hath afflicted thy people*. [Ex 5.23]

That is to say, when the devil is rejected he rises in rage and stirs up a storm in the sea. So Mark says:

*And crying out and greatly tearing him, he went out of him*. [Mk 4.38]

4. There follows: *But he was asleep*. Mark puts it like this:

*He was in the hinder part of the ship, sleeping peacefully upon a pillow*. [Mk 4.38]

Let us see what is meant by Christ's sleep, the stern of the ship, and the pillow. Christ's 'sleep' is sluggishness of faith; the 'stern' is the end of our life; the 'pillow' is the pampering of the flesh. Faith in Christ slumbers when the flesh is pampered:

*How long wilt thou be in deliciousness, O wandering daughter?* [Jer 31.22]

The soft-living will not possess the kingdom of God [cf. 1Cor 6.10]. When our flesh wallows in pleasure, our faith in Christ sleeps, and the soul closes its eyes in the 'stern'.

Intent upon pleasure, it pays no heed to the wretched end of its life.

There follows: *His disciples came to him and awaked him, saying: Lord, save us, we perish*.

Without a doubt, the man in whom the faith of Christ sleeps will perish. It should be re-awakened with renewed devotion, with the cry of confession and with the hand of holy activity.

Then, rising up, he commanded the winds and the sea.

This is similar to what Job says:

*Who shut up the sea with doors?*

*And I said: Hitherto shalt thou come, and shalt go no farther.*

*And here thou shalt break thy swelling waves*. [Job 38.8,11]

As if to say, only the Lord shuts the sea up as though with doors, the bitter sea of persecution and the devil's temptation. Temptation only comes when he pleases, and it recedes when he pleases; and when he makes it cease, he says: *Here shalt thou break thy swelling waves*. Isaiah says:

*The yoke shall putrefy at the presence of the oil*, [Is 10.27]

meaning that temptation will cease at the presence of Jesus' mercy. So when we are tempted by the devil, we should say with heartfelt devotion: "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, who commanded the winds and the sea, I command you, devil, to depart from me."

*And there came a great calm*. This is what Anna says in the book of Tobias:

*This I am sure of, that every one that worshippeth thee,*

*that his life, if it be under trial, shall be crowned;*

*and if it be under tribulation, it shall be delivered;*

*and if it be under correction, it shall be allowed to come to thy mercy.*

*For thou art not delighted in our being lost,*

*because after a storm thou makest a calm,*

*and after tears and weeping thou pourest in joyfulness*. [Tob 3.21-22]

5. And because one cannot have peace of mind without love of neighbour (for where there is love, there can be no anger or indignation) the Apostle urges us to have this, in today's Epistle:

*Owe no man anything, but to love one another. For he that loveth his neighbour hath fulfilled the Law... Love therefore is the fulfilling of the Law*. [Rom 13.8,10]

Love binds us together. I am bound to every man by a debt of love, which I am ever bound to pay. If I fulfil it as I should,

*From henceforth let no man be troublesome to me*, [Gal 6.17]

for I owe no-one anything, but this alone. Whoever asks something other than this from me is no longer walking according to love:

*Love of neighbour worketh no evil*. [Rom 13.10]

NOTES

[11] He means Sarah.

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# EPILOGUE

To you, Jesus Christ, beloved Son of God the Father, who work all our good, be all praise, all glory, all honour and all reverence. You are Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. By the kindness of your mercy and the infusion of your piety, you have granted me, unworthy as I am, to attain the long-desired end of this work.

And so, dear brothers, I the least of all of you, your brother and servant, have somehow composed this work on the Gospels around the year, for your comfort, for the edification of the faithful, and for the remission of my sins. I humbly pray and beseech you, that when you read this work you will remember me, your brother, before God the Son of God, who offered himself to God the Father on the wood of the Cross.

I ask also, that if you find in this work anything edifying, comforting, well-expressed or well-composed: you will refer all praise, all glory and all honour to the same blessed Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And if you find anything badly put, dull, or less well-

expressed: put it down to my weakness, blindness and lack of wisdom. And if anything be found in this volume that should be erased or corrected, I commit it to the discrete polishing of the wise of our Order, for clarification and emendation.

Praise be to the Father invisible; praise be to the Holy Spirit; praise be to Jesus Christ the Son, the Lord of heaven and earth. Amen. Alpha and Omega. Glory, honour and reverence, praise and blessing, without end for ever. Amen.

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

# THE MARIAN SERMONS

## I. PROLOGUE

*He shone as the morning star in the midst of a cloud,*

*and as the full moon in its days;*

*and as the sun when it shineth...*

*and as the rainbow giving light in the bright clouds,*

*and as the flower of roses in the days of the spring,*

*and as the lilies that are on the brink of the water,*

*and as the sweet-smelling frankincense in the time of summer:*

*as a bright fire,*

*and frankincense burning in the fire,*

*as a massy vessel of gold, adorned with every precious stone,*

*as an olive-tree, budding forth,*

*and a cypress-tree rearing itself on high*. [Ecclus 50.6-11]

Behold the twelve precious stones in Aaron's diadem! Behold the twelve stars in the crown of the glorious Virgin, in whose praise, and according to the four festivals of her Nativity, Annunciation, Purification and Assumption, we mean to divide this text of Ecclesiasticus into four sermons, and briefly **concord** it with each festival, as our Lady herself shall grant.

The Sermon for her Nativity:

*As the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and as the full moon in its days*.

On the Annunciation:

*As the sun when it shineth.. and as the rainbow giving light in the bright clouds*.

On the Nativity of the Lord:[1]

*As the flower of roses in the days of the spring, and as the lilies that are on the brink of the water*.

On the Purification:

*As the sweet-smelling frankincense in the time of summer: as a bright fire, and frankincense burning in the fire*,

On the Assumption:

*As a massy vessel of gold*, etc.

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# II. THE NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

**(*As the morning star*.)**

1. Let us say, then: The glorious Virgin Mary was *as the morning star*, etc.

Ecclesiasticus says:

*The glory of the stars is the beauty of heaven: enlightening the world*. [Ecclus 43.10]

In these three words, three things are to be noted, which shone forth wonderfully in the birth of the blessed Virgin: namely, the joy of the angels, in the words ‘the beauty of heaven’. There is a legend[2] that a certain holy man, while devoutly praying, heard the angels in heaven singing a sweet melody. When a year had passed, he heard the same again, on the same day. He asked the Lord to show him the meaning of this; and received the reply that on that day blessed Mary was born, and for her Nativity the angels in heaven gave praise to God. That is why the birthday of the glorious Virgin is celebrated on this day. The purity of her birth is expressed by ‘the glory of the stars’. Just

as *star differeth from star in glory* [1Cor 15.41], so the birth of the blessed Virgin differs from the birth of all other saints. The illumination of the whole world is expressed by 'enlightening the world'. The birth of the blessed Virgin gave light to a world covered by darkness and the shadow of death. Hence the words of Ecclesiasticus are apt: *As the morning star in the midst of a cloud*, etc.

2. The morning star is called Lucifer, because it shines more brightly among all the other stars, with what is properly called 'radiance'. Lucifer, going before the sun and heralding the morning, scatters the shades of night with the brightness of its light. The true morning star, or Lucifer, is blessed Mary; who, born in the midst of a cloud, put to flight the shadowy cloud, and in the morning of grace heralded the sun of justice to those who sat in darkness. And so the Lord says of her in Job:

*Canst thou bring forth Lucifer in its time?* [Job 38.32]

When the time of mercy came, the time to build the Lord's house, the acceptable time and the day of salvation, then the Lord brought forth 'Lucifer'- blessed Mary- to be the light of the people. They should say to her what the people said to Judith, in that book:

*The Lord hath blessed thee by his power,*

*because by thee he hath brought our enemies to nought.*

*Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord the most high God,*

*above all women upon the earth.*

*Blessed be the Lord who made heaven and earth,*

*who hath directed thee to the wounding of the head of the prince of our enemies.*

*Because he hath so magnified thy name this day,*

*that thy praise shall not depart out of the mouth of men.* [Jdth 13.22-25]

Blessed Mary, then, was like the morning star in her Nativity; of which Isaiah says:

*There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse:*

*and a flower shall rise up out of his root*. [Is 11.1]

Note that blessed Mary is called a 'rod' because of five qualities which it has: length, straightness, firmness, gracefulness and flexibility. In the same way, blessed Mary has

'length' in contemplation; 'straightness' in the perfection of her justice; 'firmness' in the stability of her mind; 'gracefulness' in her poverty; and 'flexibility' in her humility. She is the rod, sprung from the root of Jesse, who was the father of David, from whom was descended *Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ* [Mt 1.16]. So in today's Gospel we read: *The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David*, etc. [Mt 1.1].

**(A moral sermon for the same feast on penitence: *There shall come forth*.)**

3. *There shall come forth a rod out of the root*, etc. Let us see what is the moral significance of the root, the rod and the flower. The root is humility of heart; the rod is rightness of confession and discipline of satisfaction; and the flower is the hope of eternal beatitude. Jesse means 'island' or 'sacrifice', and so he stands for the penitent, whose mind should be like an island. An island is situated in the salty sea; so the mind of the penitent is situated in the 'sea' of bitterness, beaten by the waves of temptation, yet standing immovable. He offers a sacrifice of justice to the Lord in the odour of sweetness. The root of this Jesse is humble contrition, from which arises the rod of right confession and the discipline of well-judged affliction. Note, too, that the flower arises not from the top of the rod, but from the root: *A flower shall rise up out of his root*, because the 'flower', the hope of eternal life, does not spring from bodily affliction but from humility of mind.

There is a **concordance** to this in today's Gospel, in which Matthew, describing the genealogy of Christ, starts with Abraham and then mentions David and the exile in Babylon. In Abraham, who said: *I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes* [Gen 18.27], we see humility of heart. In David, whose heart was right with the Lord: *I have found David a man according to my own heart* [Ac 13.23], we see rightness of confession. In the Babylonian exile we see the discipline of affliction and the bearing of tribulation. If this three-fold generation comes in you first, then you will reach the fourth generation, that is, of Jesus Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary. Of her birth today is said: *As the morning star in the midst of a cloud*.

4. There follows: *And as the full moon shineth in its days*. Blessed Mary is called a 'full moon' because she is perfect in every way. The half-moon is imperfect, having markings and horns; but the glorious Virgin had no spot in her birth, because she was sanctified in her mother's womb and guarded by angels; and no horns of pride in her days, so that she shines fully and perfectly. She is called 'light', because she scatters the darkness.

We ask you then, our Lady, that as you are the morning star, you may by your splendour drive away the cloud of the devil's suggestions which covers the earth of our minds. Do you, who are the full moon, fill our emptiness and scatter the darkness of our sins, so that we may be able to come to the fulness of eternal life, to the light of unending glory. May he grant this, who brought you forth to be our light, who made you to be born on this day, that he might be born of you. To him be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

# III. THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

**(*As the sun when it shineth*)**

1. *As the sun when it shineth... and as the rainbow giving light in the bright clouds*,

Ecclesiasticus says:

[*The sun is*] *an admirable vessel, the work of the Most High*. [Ecclus 43.2]

Blessed Mary is called a 'vessel', because she is "the bride-chamber of the Son of God, the guest-room of the Holy Spirit, and the banqueting hall of the Holy Trinity."[3] Ecclesiasticus says:

*He that made me rested in my tabernacle*. [Ecclus 24.12]

This vessel is *an admirable work of the Most High*, that is, of the Son of God, who made her in whom he himself took flesh to be more beautiful than all other mortals, holier than all other saints.

*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*. [Jn 1 14]

The third book of Kings says of this admirable work, that Solomon carved on the doors of the temple cherubims and figures of palm-trees and reliefs [cf. 3(1)Kg 6.32]. Blessed Mary is the gate of heaven and the door of paradise. On her the true Solomon has engraved 'cherubim' (the angelic life and the fulness of charity), 'palm-trees' (which stand for victory over the enemy, the evergreenness of perseverance and the heights of contemplation), and 'reliefs' (outstanding heavenly qualities, humility and virginity). All these were engraved by the hand of Wisdom upon the blessed Virgin. It is well said of her, then: *As the sun when it shineth*.

**(On the same text, on the nature and chastity of the elephant.)**

2. Note that blessed Mary was like the shining sun at the angel's Annunciation; as a bright rainbow at the conception of the Son of God; and as the rose and the lily at his Nativity. The sun has three properties: brightness, whiteness and heat, which correspond to the three utterances of Gabriel. The first is: *Hail, full of grace*; the second: *Fear not*; the third: *The Holy Spirit will come upon you*.

When he says: *Hail full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women-*

there is the brightness of the sun. We can relate this to four virtues, each of which you may find shining threefold in Mary. From temperance she derived control of the flesh, modesty of speech and lowliness of heart. She showed prudence when she was silent though troubled, when she understood what she heard, and when she replied to what was proposed. She possessed justice when she gave to each its proper due. She followed custom with a steadfast heart in her espousal, in her Son's circumcision, and in her legal purification. She showed compassion to the afflicted when she said: *They have no wine*; and communion with the saints when she was *persevering in prayer with the Apostles and the women* [cf. Ac 1.14]. From fortitude or greatness she undertook the intention of virginity, she held to it, and showed faith in so great a matter.

According to St Bernard,[4] the twelve stars in the crown of the woman [cf. Apoc 12.1] represent the twelve privileges of the Virgin- four heavenly privileges, four bodily, and four of the heart.

The heavenly privileges are: Mary’s generation, the angelic salutation, the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, the ineffable conception of the Son of God.

The bodily privileges are: her outstanding virginity, her undefiled fruitfulness, her unburdensome pregnancy, her painless child-bearing.

The privileges of her heart are: devout humility, modest meekness, unfaltering faith, martyrdom of the heart (whereby a sword pierced her soul).

The heavenly privileges can be related to: *The Lord be with you*; the bodily to: *Blessed art thou among women*; and those of the heart to: *Full of grace*.

3. When he says: *Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus*- there is the whiteness of the sun. How could she conceive the whiteness of the eternal light, as a mirror without spot, unless she herself were white? And so, in Canticles, the Son says of her whiteness:

*Thy belly is as ivory, set with sapphires*. [cf. Cant 5.14]

Ivory comes from the tusk of an elephant, and is white and cold. It therefore denotes a two-fold purity, mental (whiteness) and bodily (coldness). Both these were present in the bridechamber of the glorious Virgin. Natural History tells us that the elephant is tamer and more obedient than any other wild animal. It takes instruction well, it understands, and so it can be taught to show reverence to a king. It has good sense. Yet it shuns the very scent of a mouse, an animal said to be generated from the moisture of the earth. In this respect it resembles the blessed Virgin, who was more humble and obedient than any other, and who adored the king she bore. The mouse, generated from earthly moisture (greedy pleasures), represents lust. The blessed Virgin shunned not only these things, but the very scent of them. She trembled even at the coming of the angel. In the same way, anyone who wants to live chastely in Christ Jesus should flee not simply the

mouse of lust, but its very scent! No wonder they ought to flee from fornication, if the elephant, as big as a mountain, runs away from a mouse!

**(Against lust: *I will destroy the name of Babylon*.)**

4. So the Lord says by Isaiah:

*I will destroy the name of Babylon,*

*and the remains, and the bud, and the offspring*. [Is 14.22]

The just man, Nazirite of the Lord, should destroy ‘the name of Babylon’, that is, all kinds of luxurious living. So we read:

*Let old matters depart from your mouth;* [1Kg(Sm) 2.3]

and:

*Let my mouth not speak the works of men*. [Ps 16.4]

‘And the remains’, those images of lust which often remain after sin has been put away; ‘and the bud’, the wandering lust of the eyes, of which Isaiah says:

*Out of the root of the serpent shall come forth a basilisk,*

*and his seed shall swallow the bird*. [Is 14.29]

From the root of the serpent (the devil’s prompting, or the consent of the mind) there comes forth a basilisk; because as St Augustine says,[5] "The shameless eye is herald of the shameless heart." And his seed (the flattering word, the winning smile) swallows the bird (the just man). Alas! How many birds are swallowed by this unhappy process, this excess! And so the offspring (every circumstance of lust) must be destroyed and exterminated; in order that the belly (the mind) may be as ivory. It is well said then: *His belly is as ivory, set with sapphires*.

The sapphire is a stone sky-blue in colour, and the devil will not come near a house where it is. The sapphire represents heavenly contemplation; the devil will not approach a mind in which it is found. Yet because there is not always time for contemplation, the text speaks of being ‘set’ with sapphires. It is as though to say that the sapphires are not a total covering, and the contemplative live is not always to be insisted on. The womb of the glorious Virgin was as ivory set with sapphires, because she surpassed all in the whiteness of virginity, as regards the body; and in the beauty of contemplation, as to the soul.

**(On the same text, on the reason why leaves or foliage fall from a tree; and on the four colours which are in the heavenly bow.)**

5. When he says: *The Holy Spirit will come upon you*, behold, the heat [of the sun]! Heat sustains and nourishes all living things, and the lack of it results in weakness and death. Death is the extinction of natural heat in the heart, due to a lack of moistness and the coming of its contrary. The cause of leaves falling is the removal of the heat that feeds them. In winter-time, when cold dominates the outside of trees and plants, the heat flees from its contrary and hides in the roots. When it increases there, it draws to itself moisture from the upper branches and extremities, so that this increase in heat is moderated and the lower parts do not burn. When their sustenance is withdrawn, the leaves are bound to fall from the upper parts. The grace of the Holy Spirit is 'heat', and if it withdraws from the human heart the moisture of compunction fails, and the unhappy soul falls into the depths of sin. When the cold of wickedness approaches, the heat of the Holy Spirit flees from its contrary, and so the soul is despoiled of all its goods. The entry of vice brings about the departure of virtue. So the book of Wisdom says:

*The Holy Spirit of discipline will flee from the deceitful,*

*and will withdraw himself from thoughts that are without understanding;*

*and he shall not abide when iniquity cometh in.* [Wisd 1.5]

That is to say, he is snatched away, together with all his goods, because of the entry of wickedness. But when heat returns, the earth conceives and germinates plants, and brings forth fruit. Just so, when the Holy Spirit came, the blessed earth conceived and gave birth to the blessed fruit, removing every curse. Yes, The Holy Spirit will come upon you. Blessed Mary was 'as the shining sun' at the angel's Annunciation.

6. Further, she was 'as a bright rainbow' in the conception of the Son of God. A rainbow is caused by the conjunction of sun and cloud, and it has four colours: violet, blue, gold and flame. So, when the Sun of Justice, the Son of God, entered this day into the 'cloud' of the glorious Virgin, the Virgin herself became 'as a bright rainbow', the sign of the covenant of peace and reconciliation, amid clouds of glory: that is, between God and sinners. So Genesis says:

*I will set my bow in the clouds,*

*and it shall be a sign of a covenant between me and the earth*. [Gen 9.13]

Note that two clouds are implied: the wrath of God and the guilt of man. God and man were at war with one another, God wielding the sword of wrath to strike man and cast him into death, and man wielding the sword of guilt as he mortally sinned against God. But after the Sun entered the Virgin, peace and reconciliation came about, because he himself, the Son of God and of the Virgin, made satisfaction to the Father for man's guilt,

and restrained God's anger lest it strike man. These clouds are called ‘clouds of glory’, inasmuch as they are dispelled by the glorious Virgin.

Note that the violet colour of the rainbow represents the poverty of blessed Mary, the blue her humility, the gold her charity, and the flame (for a flame cannot be cut or injured by a sword) her spotless virginity. Of this rainbow, Ecclesiasticus says:

*Look upon the rainbow, and bless him that made it: it is very beautiful in its brightness.*

*It encompasseth the heaven about with the circle of its glory*. [Ecclus 43.12-13]

Look upon the rainbow: that is, consider the beauty, holiness and dignity of blessed Mary; and bless with heart and mouth and deed her Son, who made her thus. In the brightness of her holiness she is very beautiful, beyond all daughters of God. She has encompassed the heaven about (that is, she has enclosed the divinity) within the circle of her glory, her glorious humanity.

We implore you, then, our Lady and only hope, to enlighten our minds with the brightness of your glory; to cleanse them with the whiteness of your purity; to warm them with the heat of your visitation; and to reconcile us to your Son, so that we may be found fit to attain the brightness of his glory. May he grant this, who at the angel’s Annunciation took from you this day his glorious flesh, and willed to dwell nine months in your bride-chamber. To him be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

**(*I will be as the dew*.)**

7. *I will be as the dew: Israel shall spring as the lily,*

*and his root shall shoot forth as that of Libanus.*

*His branches shall spread, and his glory shall be as the olive tree,*

*and his smell as that of Libanus*. [Hos 14.6-7]

*In that day, the mountains shall drop down sweetness,*

*and the hills shall flow with milk and honey*. [Joel 3.18]

The bright day signifies the time of grace, in which the ‘mountains’ (preachers) drop down the sweetness of preaching, and the ‘hills’ (those who hear the preaching) flow with the milk and honey of the Lord’s Incarnation. Note: the text says that the mountains ‘drop’; and indeed what they preach is but a ‘drop’ in comparison with the divine mercy which *has saved us, not in works of justice* [Tit 3.5], our justice. The hills ‘flow’, because when they have received the 'drop' of preaching, the hearers should overflow with faith in

the Incarnate Word, the Son of God, who says (in Hosea, towards the end): *I will be as the dew*, etc.

8. The Son of God is compared to the dew in virtue of three qualities. Dew comes down in the morning, it comes gently, and it brings refreshment in the heat. The Son of God came down upon the Virgin in the ‘morning-time’ of grace. It says in Exodus:

*In the morning a dew... appeared in the wilderness, small, and as it were beaten with a pestle, like unto the hoar-frost on the ground..., and the taste thereof like to flour with honey*. [Ex 16.13,14,31]

This refers to the manna. The ‘wilderness’ is the blessed Virgin, of whom Isaiah says:

*Send forth, O Lord, the lamb, the ruler of the earth,*

*from Petra of the desert, to the mount of the daughter of Sion*. [Is 16.1]

A lamb, not a lion; a ruler, not a destroyer; from the blessed Virgin to the Church which is the daughter of Sion, the heavenly Jerusalem. The blessed Virgin is called ‘Petra (a rock) of the desert’, because a rock cannot be cultivated, and that serpent the devil, who (as Solomon says) ‘cultivates shadows’ can find no path upon it [cf. Prov 30.18-19]. She is a ‘desert’, untilled and unsown with man’s seed, but made fertile by the working of the Holy Spirit.

Let it be said, then: *A dew appeared in the wilderness*, the Son of God in the blessed Virgin. He was that Manna, ‘small’ in his conception and birth, and ‘as it were beaten with a pestle’ in his Passion, wherein he was lashed with scourges, slapped and beaten, smeared with spittle. He was ‘like the hoar-frost on the ground’ in the preaching of the Apostles, for:

*Their sound has gone forth over all the earth*. [Ps 18.5]

His taste will be sweet ‘as flour mixed with honey’ (his humanity with his divinity) in the blessedness of our heavenly homeland. The Son of God may well say: *I will be like the dew*, coming down upon the Virgin in the morning time of grace.

He also resembles the dew in coming down gently; as the Psalmist says:

*He shall come down like rain upon the fleece:*

*and as showers falling gently upon the earth*. [Ps 71.6]

Note that rain comes down in one way, hail in another. Rain comes down gently, to make fertile; hail comes violently, to make sterile. In his first coming, Christ was like rain

coming down upon the fleece, the Virgin; at his second, he will be like hail, striking the wicked with the sentence of death. So David says;

*Fire, hail, snow, ice, stormy winds which fulfil his word*. [Ps 148.8]

The fire will be that which burns without consuming, of which it is said: *Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire* [Mt 25.41]. The hail will strike, as Jeremiah says: *A violent storm upon the head of the wicked* [Jer 30.23]. The snow covers all, as in Job:

*They that fear the frost* (temporal punishment)

*the snow shall fall upon them* (eternal death). [Job 6.16]

The ice which freezes and the stormy winds which never cease will be 'the portion of their cup' [Ps 10.7], of their punishment, who drink from the golden cup of Babylon (the world), which is in the hand of that harlot, concupiscence of the flesh. In his first coming, though, the Son of God was like rain coming down upon the fleece. The book of Judges tells how the dew came upon Gideon's fleece [cf. Jg 6.37-38]. St Bernard[6] says of this text, "The Son of God poured himself entirely upon the fleece of the Virgin, and afterwards upon the dry ground of the world to irrigate it."

**(On the same text, on the wool of a sheep and on the nature of butter and cheese.)**

9. The Son of God came to make himself a woollen garment from the Virgin, who may be called a ‘sheep’ because of her innocence. She is our Rachel (whose name means ‘sheep’), whom the true Jacob found beside the well of humility [cf. Gen 29.10]. Alternatively, the sheep is Adam, who could say: *I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost* [Ps 118.176]. Natural History tells us that a woollen garment from a sheep that has been torn by a wolf will teem with worms. The wool of our flesh, derived from that sheep (our first parent) who was torn by the wolfish devil, teems and rots with the worms of our unruly impulses. It was to cleanse us from defilement of flesh and spirit that Christ took on unbroken wool, such as the sheep had before the wolf's tearing. Isaiah says of him:

*He shall eat butter and honey*. [Is 7.15]

"Note that a sheep yields both butter and cheese. Butter is soft and moist, cheese hard and dry. Butter represents the innocence of our nature as it was before sin; cheese the punishment and dryness due to it after sin."[7]

*Cursed be the earth in thy labour*,

(that is, cursed be your flesh because of the sin you have committed)

*it will bring forth thorns and thistles*, [Gen 3.17]

(the greater and lesser pains that pierce.) "Christ, however, ate not cheese but butter, because he took on our nature as it was before Adam sinned," not as it was after sin. He put on not just sackcloth, but the merit of sackcloth; not sin, but the punishment for sin.

"He was like a bee settling upon a flower, the blessed Virgin of Nazareth (which means ‘flower’)." Of this bee, Ecclesiasticus says:

*The bee is small among flying things:*

*but her fruit hath the chiefest sweetness*. [Ecclus 11.3]

"In his first coming he brought the honey of mercy; at his second he will pierce with the sting of justice."

*Mercy and judgement I will sing to thee, O Lord*. [Ps 100.1]

Behold how he comes down gently like rain on the fleece!

**(On the same text, on the same matter: *Behold a mighty wind*.)**

10. Regarding this gentleness, it says in the third book of Kings:

*And behold... a great and strong wind... overthrowing the mountains and breaking the rocks in pieces: the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake: the Lord was not there, either. And after the earthquake a fire: nor was the Lord there. And after the fire, the whisper of a gentle breeze: the Lord was there*. [cf. 3(1)Kg 19.11-12]

In today’s Gospel you can find these four things: the ‘great wind’ was the angel’s greeting, promising great things. It was spoken to the strongest of women by Gabriel, whose name means ‘strength’. This greeting overthrew the mountains of pride, and broke the rocks of human hard-heartedness. The four phrases of the greeting suggest the four properties of a sapphire stone. A sapphire looks like a star, and it has these properties:

*Hail, full of grace:* (the colour of the sky);

*The Lord is with thee:* (it restrains the blood; and this is **concordant** to)

*Blessed art thou among women:* (which staunched the blood of the primal curse).

*Blessed is the fruit of thy womb:* (which slays the devil, as a sapphire puts out a glowing coal.)

Well said, then, *Behold a great wind*, etc. *and the Lord* (the Incarnation of the Word) *was not there*. And after the 'wind' of the greeting, the 'earthquake': *She was troubled at his saying, and thought within herself what this manner of salutation this should be* [Lk 1.29]. *And the Lord* (the Incarnation of the Word) *was not* yet *there*. And after the 'earthquake', the 'fire': *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee* [Lk 1.35]. Yet *the Lord was not there* either. And after the 'fire', the 'whisper of a gentle breeze': *Behold, the handmaid of the Lord*. And the Lord was there, the Incarnation of the Word! As soon as she said: *Be it done unto me according to thy word*, *the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us* [Jn 1.14].

**(On the same text, on the nature of dew and the properties of the lily.)**

11. Again, dew brings refreshment. So the Son of God poured cool water upon the human race, which was suffering from the heat of the devil's persecution. Solomon says;

*As cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good tidings from a far country*. [Prov 25.25]

The good herald of good tidings is Jesus Christ, who poured the cold water of his Incarnation abundantly upon the soul of Adam and his posterity, as they thirsted in the heat of Gehenna, when,

*by the blood of his testament he drew forth out of the pit,*

*where there is no refreshing water.* [cf. Zech 9.11]

In Hosea, the Son says: *I will be as the dew*, coming down gently at dawn and giving refreshment.

There follows: *Israel shall spring as the lily*. Israel (which means 'seeing God') is blessed Mary, who saw God as the one she nourished in her womb, suckled at her breasts, and carried into Egypt. At the coming down of the dew she sprang like the lily, whose root is medicinal, whose stem is firm and upright, and whose flower is white with a curved-back lip. The Virgin's 'root' was humility, which reduces the swelling of pride. Her 'stem' was firm by the renunciation of temporal things, and upright by the contemplation of heavenly things. Her 'flower' was white with the brightness of virginity, and she was 'curved back', like a lily looking at its root, when she said: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord*. This lily budded forth when, with virginity untainted, she gave birth to the Son of God the Father. Just as a lily does not lose its flower when it sends forth its perfume, so the blessed Virgin did not lose the flower of virginity when she gave birth to the Saviour.

There follows: *His root shall shoot forth as that of Libanus. His branches shall spread*.

The 'root' of the lily is the intention of the heart. If it is simple (according to the Lord's words: *If thine eye be simple*, meaning, if the intention of your heart is without duplicity or

deceit), then its branches will spread, its works reach up on high (so that: *thy whole body shall be light* [Lk 11.34], all the works that flow from it). In this way the ‘root’ (the intention) of the blessed Virgin was most pure and fragrant, and from it her ‘branches’ (her works) spread straight and upwards. The root of intention is called ‘of Libanus’, because from purity of intention there proceeds incense, the fragrance of good repute.

There follows: *And his glory shall be as the olive tree*. This stands for peace and mercy. The blessed Virgin Mary, our mediatrix, re-established peace between God and the sinner; for which reason God says of her: *I will set my bow in the clouds*. The two principal colours of the rainbow are those of water and of fire. Water, which nourishes all things, represents fecundity; fire, whose flame no sword can injure, represents the inviolate virginity of Mary. This is the sign of the covenant of peace between God and the sinner. It is also the olive-tree of mercy. Therefore blessed Bernard[8] says, "You have a sure access to God, O man, where you have the mother standing before the Son, and the Son before the Father. The mother shows her heart and breasts to her Son, and the Son displays his side and wounds to the Father. There will be no refusal where so many signs of charity come together."

There follows: *And his smell as that of Libanus*. Libanus means ‘whitening’, and it represents the whiteness of blessed Mary’s innocent life, the fragrance of which spreads everywhere, breathing life to the dead, pardon to the despairing, grace to the penitent and glory to the just.

By her prayers and merits may the dew of the Holy Spirit refresh the fever of our minds, put away our sins, and infuse grace; that we may become fit to attain the glory of eternal and immortal life. May he grant this!

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# IV. THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

**(*As the flower of roses in the days of the spring*.)**

12. *As the flower of roses in the days of the spring,*

*and as the lilies that are on the brink of the water*.

Ecclesiasticus says:

*Bud forth as the rose planted by the brooks of waters.*

*Give ye a sweet odour as Libanus.*

*Send forth flowers as the lily and yield a smell,*

*and bring forth leaves in grace*. [Ecclus 39.17-19]

There are three things noted in this text: the abundance of tears, incessant prayer, and cleanness of life. The 'roses' are the souls of the faithful, made red with the blood of Christ. They should be planted by the brooks of waters (abundant tears), so as to be able to bring forth fruits worthy of penitence. They should also, as Libanus, have the incense of devout prayer for a sweet fragrance. And like the lily, in the cleanness of a spotless life, they should give out the fragrance of good repute, and bring forth leaves in thanksgiving. If the souls of the faithful have all these, they will be able to present themselves worthily at today's Festival, the Nativity of the Lord, the child-bearing of the blessed Virgin, to whom the words apply: *As the flower of roses in the days of the spring*, etc.

13. "The childbearing of the glorious Virgin is compared to the rose and the lily, because just as these, when they send out their sweetest scent, do not destroy their flower, so blessed Mary remained a virgin in bringing forth the Son of God."[9] And so when the blessed Virgin bore him, his Father could say what Isaac said of Jacob:

*Behold, the smell of my son is as the smell of a plentiful field, which the Lord hath blessed*. [Gen 27.27]

The Nativity of Jesus Christ was like the scent of a meadow full of flowers, because he kept intact the flower of his mother's virginity when he came forth from her. The blessed Virgin was a meadow full of roses and lilies, which the Lord blessed: hence the words, *Blessed art thou among women*. Blessed Mary was troubled when she heard that she was blessed among women, for she had always wished to be blessed among virgins. Therefore she wondered *what manner of salutation this should be*, which seemed at first to be questionable. To make it clear that the promise of a son did not hide a danger to her virginity, she asked, *How shall this be done, because I know not man*; meaning, I have the firm intention not to know. Or it may be that she was troubled by hearing herself addressed in terms that, as it seemed to her, she little deserved. "Virtue is rare. Manifest though your holiness be, it should be hidden from you alone."[10] On the other hand, blessed Bernard also says, "Inwardly you set a small value upon yourself, as weighed in the scales of truth; yet outwardly you are mistaken about others' worth- you set a higher price on us than you take for yourself."[11]

It is of this Virgin's virginal childbearing that we say: *As the flowers of roses in the days of spring*. Spring is the time of growth, when the earth is clad in green, when it is made colourful with all kinds of flowers, when the air grows balmy, the birds sing, and the whole world seems to smile. We give you thanks, holy Father, that in the midst of winter and the cold, you have made us a spring-time full of delight. Today the Virgin, the blessed earth which the Lord has blessed, has brought forth the green grass which is the grazing of penitents: that is, the Son of God. Today she is made colourful with flowers of

roses and lilies. Today the angels sing: *Glory to God in the highest*. Today peace and tranquillity are restored to the earth. What more? The whole world smiles and rejoices, and so today the angel says to the shepherds:

*Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy that shall be to all people; for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign unto you: you shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger*. [Lk 2.10-12]

**(On the same text, against the prelates of the Church: *You will find the child*.)**

14. Beloved: pay attention to the fact that it was to shepherds of animals that the angel appeared; for (as Solomon says) *His communication is with the simple* [Prov 3.32]. Those who keep watch over simple and innocent thoughts will hear the angel saying:

*This shall be a sign unto you* (to sign yourself with);

*you will find the infant* (humility)

*laid in a manger* (not at its mother's breast: abstinence)

*and wrapped in swaddling cloths* (poverty).

This is the sign with which the Father marked his Son and sent him into the world, and you too should mark yourself with this sign. You will find the 'infant', he says, one not yet capable of speech. He was indeed one who did not speak: *He was silent, and opened not his mouth* [Is 53.7], not only in the presence of his shearer, but in that of those who stripped and killed him.

*You will find the infant*: truly an infant, remaining silent and not exposing the sins of men. Because he does not speak out, sinners think he does not see. So the Lord complains in Isaiah:

*Thou hast lied and not been mindful of me, nor thought on me in thy heart.*

*For I am silent and as one that seeth not: and thou hast forgotten me.*

*I will declare thy justice*

(that is, *I will render to thee according to thy work* [Ps 24.29])

*and thy works shall not profit thee*. [Is 57.11-12]

*You will find the infant*: alas and alas! Wherever I look, I find not an infant but one who shouts and criticizes, who grumbles or flatters. Find an infant? I find a speaker, one who *sets his mouth against heaven and his tongue has passed through the earth* [[Ps 72.9], one who spares neither just nor sinner from his criticism. I find a speaker who

*calls evil good, and good evil;*

*that puts darkness for light and light for darkness;*

*bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter*. [Is 5.20]

There follows: *Laid in a manger*. Almost all of them resemble the young of asses, who suck from behind at the breasts of gluttony and lust. The Lord was laid in a manger, but they hang upon the breasts of the great harlot, who has made drunk the inhabitants of the world with the wine of her prostitution [cf. Apoc 17.1-2], at the cost of their souls. Hereafter they will hang upon the gallows of hell.

*You will find him wrapped in swaddling cloths*. Cloths, not the furs with which our first parents were wrapped when they were cast out of paradise. Those who wear fur coats dwell with demons. They are slanderers and seducers. Indeed, the whore entraps men by using the beauty of her own hide, enticing and flattering. Seducers and harlots ‘wear fur coats’ in that they glory in outward appearance. What shall I say of our effeminate modern prelates, who dress up like a woman going to her wedding, wearing all kinds of furs, luxuriating in painted carriages, ornaments and trappings for their horses, which they redden with Christ’s blood? Look whom the Bride of Christ is entrusted to today- of Christ, who was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger! These men loll on ivory couches and wrap themselves in fur coats! Elias and John had a leather belt about their loins. You who have ‘grown old in evil days’, if you want leather, wear a belt round your loins, not a fur coat, and mortify the skin of your own body. *A man will give skin for skin*, says Job [Job 2.4]; mortify the skin of your mortal body, so as to receive it back glorified in the general Resurrection. O you shepherds of the Church, let this be a sign to you: *You shall find the infant*, etc. Sign yourselves with the sign of this child’s humility and abstinence, the gold seal of his poverty, you who live off his patrimony.

**(On the same; you will find why three Masses are sung on the Lord’s Nativity, and on the property of the lily, and its meaning.)**

15. Let us say, then: *As flowers of roses in the days of spring*. God made the world in springtime, in the month of March. In his Son’s Nativity he as it were made a new world, renewing all things. On the first day, God said: *Be light made; and light was made* [Gen 1.3]. Today, the Word of the Father, through whom all things were made, was made flesh. The Light who said: *Be light made*, was made today. And so we sing today at the Dawn Mass: *A light shall shine*.

Note that three Masses are sung today: the Midnight Mass, in which we sing: *The Lord*

*said to me* [Ps 2.7], representing the hidden generation of the Divinity, of which none can tell; the second is the Dawn Mass, referring to his birth today of his mother; the third Mass, at Terce, tells of his generation from both his mother and his Father. The Introit is: *Unto us a child is born*, and this refers to his mother; the Gospel is: *In the beginning was the Word*, and this refers to his generation from his Father. The first Mass is celebrated during the night, because the generation from the Father is hidden from us, who believe in it. The second Mass is celebrated very early in the morning, because his birth from his mother was visible, yet as it were covered by a cloud. *Who may loose the thong of his sandals* [cf. Mk 1.7], that is, investigate the secret of his Incarnation? The third Mass is celebrated in the full light of day, because in the daylight of eternity, when all darkness shall be dispelled, we shall perceive clearly how Jesus Christ was begotten of his Father and born of his mother. Then we shall know the One who knows all things, for *we shall see him face to face* and be like him [cf. 1Jn 3.2]. It is well said, then: *As dew in the days of spring*.

16. There follows: *As the lilies that are on the brink of the water*. The lily grows on untilled ground, springing up in the valleys and giving off a sweet scent. It is white, and when it is closed it retains its scent, when open it sends it forth. It has six petals, with golden rods and a stem in the midst. It heals limbs that are burned. The milk-white lily represents the blessed Virgin, white in the splendour of virginity. She was born of chaste and humble parents: Joachim (‘rising up’) and Anna (‘grace’). Today she bore the Son of God, as a lily sends forth its perfume. Her six petals are explained in the second clause of the Gospel: *When the crowds pressed upon Jesus* [Pentecost V], referring to the six steps of Solomon’s throne. The golden rods are Mary’s poverty and humility, which adorned her virginity. She is the medicine for sinners who have been burnt by the fire of sin.

Joel says of these: *All their faces shall be made like a pot* [Joel 2.6]. A pot is a cooking vessel in which water is boiled under the action of fire, and steam is emitted, together with bubbles which are maintained in the water by the pressure of air within. The pot represents the mind of a sinner, seething with bubbles of wicked thoughts, when the fire of the devil's temptation is applied to it. From this pot comes the vapour of evil consent, by which the soul's eye is blinded and the sinner's mind darkened. A face manifests the dispositions of the soul, and so it represents the works by which a man is known. So, ‘the face of a sinner becomes like a pot’ when his works are begrimed by the darkness of his mind. Blessed Mary takes this grime and scorching away, by the healing whiteness of her holiness, and she bestows health in every way on those who hope in her.

Let us say, then: *As lilies at the brink of the waters*; as though to say that just as lilies rooted by the waters retain their freshness, beauty and perfume, so blessed Mary retained the freshness and beauty of virginity when she bore her Son.

We ask you, then, our Lady and dear Mother of God, that in this, the Nativity of your Son (whom as virgin you bore, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger), you would beg for us his pardon, and with the soothing ointment of your mercy heal the burns of our soul, which we have contracted from the fire of sin. Thus may we become fit

to attain the joy of the eternal festival. May he grant this, who today deigned to be born of you, O glorious Virgin. To him be honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

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# V. THE PURIFICATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

**(*As the sweet-smelling frankincense in the time of summer*.)**

1. *As the sweet-smelling frankincense in the time of summer;*

*as a bright fire, and frankincense burning in the fire*. [Ecclus 50.8-9]

Christ says in Ecclesiasticus:

*I, like the river Dorix, and like an aqueduct, came out of paradise*. [Ecclus 24.41]

Dorix means ‘medicine of generation’, and represents Jesus Christ, a medicine for the human race fallen in Adam. Jesus Christ came out of ‘paradise’, the virgin womb, like the river Dorix and like an aqueduct, because from the moment he took flesh of the Virgin, he became like a river for us as regards faith, by the water of Baptism. He became ‘Dorix’ in his Passion, wherein he shed his blood to heal our wounds; and an ‘aqueduct’ by the infusion of graces. By him, then, as by an aqueduct, the Father infuses grace into us. That is why at the end of our prayer we say: Through our Lord, etc.

It says in Genesis:

*The Lord had planted a paradise of pleasure from the beginning,*

*wherein he placed man... to dress it and to keep it.* [Gen 2.8,15]

But man worked badly, and kept it badly; and so it was necessary for the Lord to plant another, far better, paradise (namely, blessed Mary) to which its exiles might return. In this paradise was set the second Adam, who worked in it and kept it. He worked great things, as she herself said:

*He that is mighty hath done great things for me; and holy is his name*. [Lk 1.49]

What we call ‘holy’, the Greeks call *‘agios’*, suggesting ‘un-earthly’, because those consecrated to his name should have their conversation in heaven and not on earth. He kept her, kept her unstained. He worked in her, by making her fruitful, and he kept her un-deflowered. At first the earth which was cursed in Adam's labour brought forth thorns and thistles, with hard work. Our earth, the blessed Virgin, brought forth a blessed fruit

without human labour, which she offered to God in the temple today, as it is said: *As the sweet-smelling frankincense in the time of summer*, etc.

2. The word for incense, *'thus'*, comes from the same root as 'tonsure'; though others connect it with *'theos'*, God, to whom it is offered in worship. The blessed Virgin says in Ecclesiasticus:

*I perfumed my dwelling... as Libanus not cut*. [Ecclus 24.21]

'Libanus' is a tree found in Arabia, large, and secreting an aromatic sap, and it is named after the Arabian mountain where incense is gathered, mount Libanus. It is gathered twice a year, in autumn and in spring. The 'Libanus not cut' is blessed Mary, who was never cut by the knife of concupiscence. She perfumed her dwelling (her soul) with love, and filled it with the fragrance of virtue. Because of this perfume, her dwelling gave forth the scent of humility and chastity. Blessed Mary, who because of the purity of her life may be called 'Libanus' ('whiteness'), sent forth from herself a sweet-smelling incense, the humanity of Jesus Christ, with whose fragrance the whole world is filled.

The double gathering of incense pre-figures the double offering of Christ. His mother first offered him in the temple, according to the Law of Moses. Secondly, he offered himself in sacrifice to God the Father for the reconciliation of the human race. In the first offering he was '*thus,* from *theos'*, incense offered to God; in the second he was '*thus*, tonsure', shorn for our sins. He was 'sweet-smelling incense in the days of summer', that is, in the heat of persecution by the Jews. It is the first offering that concerns us at the moment, and we shall speak something in praise of the glorious Virgin.

**(On the same text, a sermon in praise of the same Virgin: *Blessed among women*.)**

3. We read in the book of Judges that Debora said:

*Blessed among women be Jahel the wife of Heber the Cinite:*

*and blessed be she in her tent.*

*He asked for water: and she gave him milk,*

*and offered him butter in a dish fit for princes.*

*She put her left hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workman's hammer:*

*and she struck Sisara, seeking in his head a place for the wound,*

*and strongly piercing through his temples*. [Jg 5.24-26]

Falling into the sleep of death, he fainted and he died. Jahel means ‘a female deer’, and she represents blessed Mary. See the sermon: *A certain woman lifting up her voice* [Lent III]. She is called ‘wife of Heber the Cinite’, Heber meaning ‘sharing’ and Cinite ‘possession’; standing for Jesus Christ who shared our nature, and says in the Proverbs of Solomon:

*The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways*. [Prov 8.22]

The ways of God are his works, in the beginning of which he possesses Wisdom, because as creation began to come into being he had the Son, who with him disposed all things. Another translation is:

*The Lord created me as the beginning of his ways into his works*.

This is to be understood as the Incarnation of the Lord. God ‘created me’ according to the flesh. The flesh acknowledges God; glory signifies the Father; the creature confesses the Lord; charity knows the Father as the beginning (or in the beginning) of his ways. As he himself says: *I am the Way* [Jn 14.6] that leads the Church to life. It was for the redemption of his works that he was made from the Virgin. His flesh, then, was for the sake of his works; his divinity was before his works. Blessed Mary is called his ‘wife’ in that he rested in her bride-chamber and took flesh from her. *Blessed be she*, then, *in her tent*. *All generations will call me blessed*, she says. She is blessed in her tent, because he who created her rested within her. To her praise, who surpasses all praise, and in whose praise every material thing falls short and every tongue stammers (yet matter does offer itself, and devotion does desire to say something of her, however little), we are setting forth something about this tent, as though with a shaking hand.

**(On the same text, on the construction of the tabernacle and on Moses’ bulrush, and their meaning.)**

4. *Blessed be Jahel in her tent*.

The Lord spoke to Moses in Exodus, saying:

*Thou shalt make the tabernacle in this manner:*

*Thou shalt make ten curtains of fine twisted linen,*

*and violet and purple and scarlet twice dyed, diversified with embroidery.*

*Thou shalt make also eleven curtains of goats' hair, to cover the top of the tabernacle.*

*Thou shalt make also another cover to the roof, of rams' skins dyed red:*

*and over that again another cover of violet coloured skins.*

*Thou shalt make also the boards of the tabernacle standing upright of setim wood*. [Ex 26.1,7,14-15]

Note that the Scholastic History[12] comments on this text: "The tabernacle was the house dedicated to God, rectangular in shape and enclosed within three walls, to the north, south and west. On the east side was open access, so that it might be lit by the rays of the rising sun. It was thirty cubits long, ten wide and ten high. The south side was made up of twenty boards of setim wood, each ten cubits long, four fingers thick, and one and a half cubits wide. These were joined together by mortices, so that there should be no rims or unevenness in the wall. They were gilded on each side, and each stood on two silver sockets at the corners, the holes of which were fitted with gold hinges. The north wall was made according to the same pattern, and on the west there were seven boards, just like the others and standing in the same way upon their bases." When the boards were set up in this manner, the roof was made from the four coverings we have mentioned, with the curtains, the goats' skins, the rams' skins dyed red, and the blue ones.

The tabernacle represents blessed Mary, in whom Christ armed himself with the breast-plate of justice and the helmet of salvation, to do battle against the powers of the air. Regarding these arms, see the Gospel: *When a strong man armed* [Lent III]. She is the house dedicated to God, anointed with the consecration of the Holy Spirit, four-square with the principal virtues, lengthened to final perseverance, enclosed with three walls of virtue to north, south and west. The north represents the devil's temptation, the south the deceits of the world, and the west falling into sin. She was closed to the north, as in Genesis:

*She will crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel*. [Gen 3.15]

Blessed Mary crushed the 'head', the beginning, of the devil's temptation, when she made her vow of virginity; he 'lay in wait for her heel' when at the last he made her Son to be caught and crucified by the Jews.

She was closed to the south; whence Luke says:

*And the angel being come in said unto her: Hail, full of grace*. [Lk 1.28]

Mary was 'within', enclosed, when the angel entered. It was because she was 'within' that she merited a blessing. Those who are always abroad do not deserve the angel's greeting. 'Hail' is not said to them, but rather (as Amos says):

*In all places that are without they shall say, Alas, alas!* [Am 5.16]

It is not from God that those outside get a greeting. In Matthew, the Lord rebukes those who looked for greetings in the market-place [cf. Mt 23.7]. He who goes out in public places does not deserve to be greeted by God or by his angel, who love what is secret. So in Matthew, as he sends his Apostles, he says:

*Salute no man by the way; but into whatever house you enter, first say:*

*Peace be to this house*. [Lk 10.4-5]

He bids them give a greeting, not to those on the road or working in the fields, but to those in the house. Those who are outside are deprived of the divine greeting.

5. Again, she was enclosed to the west. In Exodus it says that Moses was hidden for three months. When he could be hidden no longer, his mother took a basket made of bulrushes, and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the little babe inside, and laid him in the reed-bed by the river-bank [cf. Ex 2.2-3]. Let us see what is meant by Moses, the three months, the basket of rushes, the bitumen and the pitch, and the river. Moses is Jesus Christ, who was hidden for 'three months', that is, for three ages: before the foundation of the world, from that foundation until Moses, and from Moses to the Annunciation to blessed Mary, who was the 'rush basket' closed on each side with 'bitumen and pitch'.

A basket is a simple wicker container, and the three elements from which it is made stand for the three chief virtues of blessed Mary- the 'rush' of humility, the 'bitumen' of virginity and the 'pitch' of poverty. The bulrush is a strong, tough plant, of such a nature that even if it is dried up, it grows green again when it is watered. If it is cut and then fixed in the ground, it puts down roots again. Humility is just like that; it is so strong that even if it is held in contempt and rejected as 'dried up', yet if it is set in the ground (towards which the humble person always looks) it puts forth even deeper roots of humility. In this way, Jesus Christ reposed in the blessed Virgin as in a basket, and was exposed to the flowing river of this world; he whom the 'king's daughter' (Holy Church) adopted as her own child.

A 'reed-bed' is simply a place full of reeds and rushes and thorns. Blessed Mary was enclosed within these three, lest she be stained by the devil's temptation, the world's deceit or the pleasure of sin. Canticles says of this triple enclosure:

*A garden enclosed is my sister, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up*. [Cant 4.12]

Blessed Mary is called the 'sister' of Christ, from their common dwelling in the flesh. She was a garden enclosed with the wall of humility to the north, a garden enclosed with the wall of poverty to the south, and a fountain sealed up with the seal of virginity to the west. These are the 'boards gilded within and without', inseparably joined and equally disposed, set upon the silver bases of pure intention and the confession of divine praise.

6. Regarding this triple enclosure, and the east from which the tabernacle was lit, there is a **concordance** in Ezekiel:

*And I turned to the way of the outward sanctuary, which looked towards the east;*

*and it was shut. And the Lord said to me: This gate shall be shut.*

*It shall not be opened and no man shall pass through it:*

*because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered in by it; and it shall be shut for the prince.*

*The prince himself shall sit in it, to eat bread before the Lord*. [Ezek 44.1-3]

The gate, through which goods are carried in and out, stands for blessed Mary, through whom we receive the rewards of grace. She is the 'gate of the outward sanctuary', not the inner. The inner sanctuary is the divinity, the outer is the humanity. "The Father gave majesty, the mother weakness."[13] The 'way of this gate' was humility, towards which everyone should turn with the prophet. The humility of the Virgin 'looked towards the east', that she might be illumined by its radiance. Three times this gate is said to be 'shut', since blessed Mary was enclosed to north, south and west, as has been said. She was humbly open to the east, that is, to Jesus Christ who came from heaven. So there is added: *No man shall pass through it*, referring to Joseph, who was to have no knowledge of her. *It shall be shut for the prince* refers to the devil, the prince of this world. It was closed to his suggestions, because her mind was open to no temptation, just as her body knew no contact with a man. *The prince alone* means Jesus Christ, who sits in her by the humility of the flesh he took, to eat bread before the Lord: that is, to do the will of the Father who sent him [cf. Jn 4.34]. With the boards of virtue thus disposed, the roof is put on, the curtains, the goat-skins, and the skins of red and blue. In the Virgin alone, the life of all the saints redounds; she is capable of all the virtues.

Note that the Church of Christ is divided into Militant and Triumphant. The Church Militant possesses the curtains and the goats' hair; the Church Triumphant has the red and blue skins. The curtains diversified with embroidery, that is, with fine and varied needle-work, represent all the just of the Church Militant. The twisted linen represents good religious, constrained to the pureness of chastity and bodily abstinence. The violet are those who put aside all earthly things and give themselves only to the sweetness of contemplation. The purple are those who crucify themselves with the memory of the Lord's Passion, and as it were in the mind's eye contemplate him hanging on the Cross, with water and blood flowing from his side, his head inclined as he gave up his spirit; and they drench themselves with tears that will not be stemmed. The scarlet twice-dyed are those who burn with love for God and neighbour. The goats' hair represents penitents who make satisfaction for what they have done, in sack-cloth and ashes (see the Gospel for Easter, towards the end).

The red skins stand for all the martyrs, who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, and who having triumphed from the world have attained, crowned, to the Church Triumphant. The blue are all confessors whose conversation was in heaven, and so have passed from hope to reality. Blessed Mary, even while in the Church Militant, possessed the virtues of all the just, saying with Ecclesiasticus:

*In me is all grace of the way and of the truth;*

*in me is all hope of life and of virtue*. [Ecclus 24.25]

She had, too, exceeding compassion for penitents, so as to say: *They have no wine*; which was as if to say: "O my Son, pour the grace of your love upon penitents, because they lack the wine of compunction." Now she reigns in glory, enjoying the reward of all the saints, because she is lifted up above the choirs of angels. Behold the *tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation* [cf. Heb 9.11], but built and dedicated by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Well may we say: *Blessed be Jahel in her tent*.

**(A sermon on the same subject, in praise of the same Virgin: *He asked for water and she gave him milk*; and on the nature of the dove and the turtle-dove, and on the three parts of a candle, and on the four verses of the *Nunc Dimittis*, and what all these things mean.)**

7. There follows: *He asked her water; and she gave him milk, and offered him butter in a dish fit for princes*.

Sisara means ‘exclusion of glory’, and he stands for the devil, who being himself excluded from glory, strives to shut the faithful out from it too. When he sought the water of concupiscence, our Jahel gave him milk. It was the divine plan to hide the secret of the Lord's Incarnation from the devil. When he saw blessed Mary espoused to a man, pregnant, bearing a child and suckling it, he thought her fallen. He asked the water of concupiscence as a fee, reckoning her corrupt. But even as the Virgin suckled her Son, she deceived the devil, and so killed him with tent-peg and mallet. The tent-peg, with which the tent was shut, is blessed Mary’s virginity; the mallet, T-shaped, represents the Cross of Christ. Thus Jahel, blessed Mary, slew the devil with the tent-peg of her bodily virginity, and the mallet of her Son’s Passion. It is as the book of Judith says:

*One Hebrew woman hath made confusion in the house of king Nabuchodonosor:*

*for behold, Holofernes lieth upon the ground; and his head is not on him*. [Jdth 14.16]

Adonai, Lord, great and wonderful God! To you be praise and glory, because you have given us salvation by the hand of your daughter and mother, the glorious Virgin Mary.

Yet we should note that the text also contains these words: *She offered him butter in a*

*dish fit for princes*. It is on this verse that we base what we are going to say, so let us see what the dish, the princes and the butter mean. The dish is the humility of poverty, the princes are the Apostles, and the butter is the humanity of Jesus Christ. It was in the humility of her poverty (which those princes were to have, who, rich in faith, were poor in this world) that she offered in the temple today the 'butter', the Son whom she had borne and of whom Isaiah says: *He shall eat butter and honey* [Is 7.15]. The 'honey' is his divinity, the 'butter' is his humanity, and he 'ate butter and honey' when he united the divine to human nature; thereby knowing, and making us to know, 'how to refuse the evil and choose the good'. In her poverty, she offered her Son; and with him the sacrifice of the poor, *a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons* [Lev 2.24], as was written in the Law of the Lord, namely Leviticus, where it says that if a woman having received seed shall bear a man-child, she shall be unclean seven days [cf. Lev 12.2]. In contradistinction, she who gave birth was a Virgin, so that neither Son nor mother needed to be purified by sacrifices: it was to free us from the fear of the Law, the observance of a Law kept out of fear. So the text adds that when the forty days of her purification are over, she should offer a lamb at the door of the tabernacle; but if her hand find not sufficiency, and she is not able to find a lamb, then she should take two turtle-doves or two young pigeons. This was the offering of poor folk who could not afford a lamb; so by all this the humility and poverty of the Lord was made evident. Those who are truly poor make this offering to the Lord.

8. Note that if a turtle-dove loses its mate, it will go without a mate ever after, and wander alone. It will not drink clear water, nor rest on a green branch. Again, a dove is simple: its nest is rougher and poorer than any other, it hurts none with beak or claw, it does not live by hunting. It feeds its young with its beak, with its own food. It does not feed on carrion, or attack other birds- not even the smallest. It eats pure grain, and fosters the young of others as its own. It dwells near flowing water, to avoid the hawk. It makes its nest in the rocks, and in tempestuous weather it flees to its nest. It defends itself with its wings, it flies in flocks, and its song is a sigh. It is fertile, and rears twin young. Note also that when the dove has young, and the chicks are growing, the male goes and sucks salty ground, and puts what he has sucked into the mouths of the chicks, to accustom them to food. And if the female is tardy in returning to her young, due to the pain of birth, the male strikes her and puts her back in the nest by force.[14]

Similarly the poor in spirit, the truly penitent who by sinning mortally have lost their companion Jesus Christ, live alone, in loneliness of mind and even of body, far from the tumult of the world. They do not drink the still water of worldly joy, but the troubled water of sorrow and tears. The Lord said, *My soul is troubled, and what shall I say?* [Jn 12.27]. They do not settle on the green branch of temporal glory, of which Ezekiel says: *They have put the branch to their noses* [Ezek 8.17]. Carnal folk put the branch of worldly glory to their noses, so as not to smell the stench of sin or hell.

Again, they are as simple as doves. The nest of their conversation, and even the bed where they sleep bodily, is rough and poor. They injure no-one, indeed they forgive those who injure them. They do not live by robbery, rather they share what they have. They feed those in their care with the word of preaching, and the grace they have

received they share freely with others. They do not feed on the carrion of mortal sin; as the verse says:

"Dead things fall by iron; dead things by death."[15]

They scandalize neither great nor small; they feed on the pure grain of the Church's preaching, not that of heretics, which is unclean. Being ‘all things to all men’, they are as full of zeal for the salvation of others as for their own. They love everyone in the Heart of Jesus Christ. They dwell by the flowing waters of sacred Scripture, so as to see from afar and avoid the temptation of the devil who is scheming to catch them. They build their nest in the clefts of the rock, the wounded side of Jesus Christ. If some storm of fleshly temptation blows up, they flee to the side of Christ and hide themselves there, saying with the Psalmist:

*Be to me, O Lord, a strong tower in the face of the enemy;* [Ps 60.4]

and again:

*Be to me a God who protects*. [Ps 70.3]

They defend themselves with the wings of humility and patience, not with the talons of revenge. "Patience is the best kind of retaliation," says a philosopher;[16] and also "Patience is a harbour in our miseries."[17] They fly to heaven together, in the unity of the Church, the congregation of the faithful. Fecund with the offspring of good will, they carefully nourish the twin offspring, love of God and of neighbour.

Note also that every penitent should possess these two: mercy and justice. Mercy is as the female guarding her young, justice is the male. The ‘salt earth’ is Jesus Christ, man of sorrows, from whom the penitent should suck bitterness and saltness, to place in the mouth of his ‘young’ (his works) to accustom them to such food, and live always in sorrow and bitterness, crucifying their members, with their vices and concupiscences. But because discretion is the mother of all the virtues, without which no sacrifice should be offered, then if the dove of mercy be tardy in coming to her young, because of the birth-pangs of compunction and groaning, then justice, as the male, should correct her and as it were force her back in to nourish her young and take care of them. The penitent should sorrow for sin, yet nevertheless he should not deprive himself of what is necessary for him to live.

Whoever offers doves and pigeons of this kind, the High Priest Jesus Christ will cleanse from every issue of blood, the uncleanness of sin. So let us get back to the matter from which we have somewhat digressed, the text: *As sweet-smelling frankincense in the time of summer*.

9. There follows: *As a bright fire, and frankincense burning in the fire*.

Note that today the Church's faithful carry a bright fire, in candles made of wax and tow. The fire is the divinity, the wax the humanity, and the tow the harshness of Christ's Passion. Today the blessed Virgin carried and offered God's Son and hers in the temple. It is in imitation of this that today the faithful carry and offer fire in a candle. In these three elements, true penitence is represented: fire is the ardour of contrition, eradicating the whole brood of vices; the wax is the confession of sin. *As wax melts before the fire* [Ps 67.3], so in the presence of ardent contrition confession flows from the mouth of the penitent, with flowing tears. The tow is the roughness of satisfaction. In these three is Jesus, the salvation of men, and whoever offers these things to God can say with the just man:

*Lord, now you may let your servant depart in peace*, etc. Lk 2.29]

Note that in these four verses, four blessings upon the penitent man are expressed. The first is the full remission of sins, and peace of conscience: *Now you may dismiss*. The second is at the separation of soul and body, when he sees the one whom he has believed in and desired: *For mine eyes have seen*. The third is at the ordeal of the last Judgement, at which is said:

*Give her of the fruit of her hands,*

*and they will praise him in the gates for her works*: [Prov 31.31]

*Which thou hast prepared*, etc. The fourth is in the light of eternal glory, wherein he shall see face to face, and *know as he is known* [cf 1Cor 13.2]: *A light to lighten*, etc. Well may we say, then: *As a bright fire, and frankincense burning in the fire*.

Jesus Christ shone like a fire on the shepherds at his Nativity, on the three Magi at his Manifestation, on Simeon and Anna as the prophesied at his mother's Purification. In his true Passion, he burned like incense in the fire, and heaven and earth and hell are filled with his fragrance; angels in heaven rejoice over the redemption of the human race, the dead are raised to life, and those captive in hell are set free.[18]

We ask you, then, our Lady and chosen mother of God, to purify us from the blood of sin, to make us bear the burning fire of contrition in the wax of confession and the tow of satisfaction: so that we may be made fit to attain the light and glory of the heavenly Jerusalem. May he grant this, whom you offered today in the temple, and to whom be glory and honour for evermore. Amen.

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# VI. THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

**(*As a massy vessel of gold*.)**

1. *As a massy vessel of gold, adorned with every precious stone;*

*as an olive tree budding forth, and a cypress-tree rearing itself on high*. [Ecclus 50.10-11]

Jeremiah says:

*A high and glorious throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctification, the hope of Israel*. [Jer 17.12]

The word ‘throne’ comes from words meaning ‘a firm seat to sit on’. The ‘glorious throne’ is blessed Mary, who was in every respect firm and complete. In her the glory of the Father, the wise Son (indeed, Wisdom himself) Jesus Christ, ‘sat’ when he took flesh from her. So the Psalm says:

*that glory may dwell in our land*. [Ps 84.10]

The glory of the heights (that is, of the angels) dwells on earth, in our flesh. Therefore blessed Mary was the glorious throne, the throne of Jesus Christ, who is the glory of the heights (the angels). So Ecclesiasticus says:

*The firmament on high is his beauty,*

*the beauty of heaven with its vision of glory*. [Ecclus 43.1]

Jesus Christ is the ‘firmament on high’, of the angelic heights which he himself made firm when the Apostate and his followers fell away. So Job says:

*Thou perhaps made the heavens with him,*

*which are most strong, as if they were* (founded) *of molten brass*. [Job 37.18]

This is as if to say: did not the Wisdom of the Father make the heavens (i.e. the angelic nature)? So, *In the beginning God created the heavens* [Gen 1.1], which is to be understood as "that which contains and is contained."[19] But when the angels who sinned were dragged bellowing down to hell [cf. 2Pt 2.4], the good ones who held fast to the supreme Good were firmly fixed, as if cast in bronze. The durability of bronze represents the firm foundation of the angels who stayed loyal. Jesus Christ, the firm foundation of the angelic height, is its beauty. Those whom he establishes by the power of his divinity, he satisfies with the beauty of his humanity. He is, then, the ‘beauty of heaven’, that is to say of all living souls who dwell in heaven; and this beauty consists in the vision of his glory. When the blessed behold the glory of the Father face to face, they shine with glory in their turn. How great, then, is the dignity of the glorious Virgin, who was found fit to be

the mother of him who is the foundation and the beauty of the angels, and the glory of all the saints.

**(A sermon on the same text: *The place of our sanctification*; and: *The firmament of height*.)**

2. Let us say, then: *A high and glorious throne from the beginning*, that is, from the foundation of the world; namely the mother of God who is *predestined in power, according to the spirit of sanctification* [Rom 1.4]. So these words follow: *the place of our sanctification, the hope of Israel*. The blessed Virgin was the 'place of our sanctification', that is, of the Son of God who sanctifies us. Regarding this, he himself says in Isaiah:

*The fir-tree and the box-tree and the pine-tree together,*

*to beautify the place of my sanctuary;*

*and I will glorify the place of my feet*. [Is 60.13]

The fir-tree is so called because it is the first among all trees, and it represents those who contemplate heavenly things. The box-tree does not grow high, and has no fruit but much greenery. It stands for the newly converted, who hold to a faith ever green. The pine, loveliest of the tees, is so-called from the sharpness of its leaves; for the ancients used the word 'pine' for 'sharp'. It represents penitents who are conscious of their sins, and pierce their hearts with the needle of contrition, in order to draw from them the blood of tears. All these, then, contemplatives, faithful and penitents, come on this solemn festival to adorn blessed Mary with devotion, praise and preaching, because she was the place of the sanctification of Jesus Christ, wherein he sanctified himself. So he himself says in John:

*For them do I sanctify myself*, (i.e. with a created sanctification)

*that they also may be sanctified in truth* (in me, who sanctify my humanity in myself as Word).[Jn 17.19]

In other words, I fill myself with all good things through myself as Word.

*And I will glorify the place of my feet*.

The Lord's 'feet' signify his humanity, of which Moses says in Deuteronomy:

*They that approach to his feet shall receive of his doctrine*. [Dt 33.3]

No-one can approach the Lord's feet unless he first, as Exodus says, puts off the shoes from his feet [Ex 3.5], that is, dead works from the affections of his heart. Draw near then

with bare feet, and you will receive of his doctrine. Isaiah says:

*Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand the hearing?*

*Them that are weaned from the milk, that are drawn away from the breasts*. [Is 28.9]

Whoever is taken from the milk of worldly desire, and separated from the breasts of greed and lust, will in this life be taught divine knowledge, and in the world to come be found fit to hear the words: *Come, ye blessed of my Father* [Mt 25.34].

The 'place of the Lord's feet' was blessed Mary, she from whom he took human nature, the place which he glorified this day when he lifted her above the choirs of angels. From this you may clearly infer that the blessed Virgin was assumed in the body, wherein was 'the place of the Lord's feet'. So the Psalm says:

*Arise, O Lord, into thy resting-place:*

*thou and the ark which thou hast sanctified*. [Ps 131.8]

The Lord arose when he ascended to the right hand of the Father. The ark of his sanctification arose to, when on this day the Virgin Mother was taken up to the heavenly bride-chamber. So Genesis says that:

*The ark rested... upon the mountains of Armenia*. [Gen 8.4]

Armenia means 'ragged mountain', and it represents the angelic nature, which is called 'mountain' in respect of those who stood firm, and 'ragged' or 'torn' in respect of those who fell. The ark of the true Noah, who made us 'rest from our labours on the earth the Lord had cursed' [cf. Gen 5.29], rested this day upon the mountains of Armenia, the choirs of angels.

Therefore to the praise of the same Virgin, who is the hope of Israel (that is, of Christian people), and to grace so great a festival, we shall expound the aforesaid text:

*As a massy vessel of gold*, etc.

3. Note these three things: the vessel, the olive and the cypress. Blessed Mary was a 'vessel' by her humility, 'of gold' by her poverty, and 'massy' or 'solid' by her virginity, 'adorned with every precious stone' of God's gifts. The hollowness of a vessel enables it to receive what is poured into it, and so it stands for humility, which receives the in-pouring of grace. A swelling, on the other hand, repels what is poured upon it. In Exodus, the Lord commanded that there be made a hollow in the altar, in which the ashes of the sacrifice might be deposited [cf. Ex 27.1,8]. In the hollow of humility is placed the ash which is the remembrance of our mortality. So Jeremiah says of the penitent, in

Lamentations, *He shall put his mouth in the grave* [Lam 3.29]; that is, let him speak about his own death and burial. It says in Genesis that Abraham buried Sarah in *a double cave, which looked towards Mambre* [Gen 23.19]. The ‘double cave’ is humility of heart and body, wherein the just man must bury his soul from worldly tumult; and this humility must look towards ‘Mambre’, which means ‘clear seeing’. In other words, it must look to the clarity of eternal life, not of worldly glory. This is what the humility of the blessed Virgin looked to, and so it deserved to be regarded in its turn.

And because humility is preserved by poverty, the vessel is said to be ‘of gold’. Poverty is well called ‘gold’, because it makes its possessors splendid and rich. Where there is true poverty there is sufficiency, but where there is abundance there is want. So the Philosopher[20] says, "There is rarely ruin, except from abundance"; and, "I do not reckon that man poor, to whom even a little more is enough." St Bernard[21] says, "In heaven, there is stored up an abundance of things; only poverty is not found among them. This kind of thing abounds on earth, and man knows not its value. Therefore the Son of God came to seek it, so that he might make it precious in his estimation."

Of this gold, Genesis says:

*In the land of Hevilath gold groweth, and the gold of that land is very good*. [Gen 2.11-12]

Hevilath means ‘bringing forth’, and it stands for the blessed Virgin, who, when she brought forth the Son of God, wrapped him in the bands of golden poverty. O finest gold of poverty! He who has you not, even if he has all else, has nothing! Temporal things puff up, and in so inflating they make empty. In poverty is joy; in riches, sadness and lamentation. Solomon says in Proverbs:

*Better a dry morsel with joy, than a fatted calf with strife;* [Prov 17.1]

(or: *than a house full of victims*, meaning riches which are taken from the poor by force). Again:

*A secure mind is like a continual feast.*

*Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasures without content*. [Prov 15.15]

Again:

*It is better to dwell in a wilderness* (i.e. poverty)

*than with a quarrelsome and passionate woman* (temporal abundance). [Prov 21.19]

Again:

*It is better to sit in a corner of the housetop* (the humility of poverty)

*than with a brawling woman in a common house*. [Prov 21.9]

And because the humility and poverty of blessed Mary was a marked feature of her virgin integrity, there is added: *A massy vessel of gold* (i.e., a vessel of solid gold). The blessed Virgin was 'solid' in her virginity, and so she was able to contain wisdom. But, as Solomon says,

*The heart of a fool is like a broken vessel: and no wisdom at all shall it hold*. [Ecclus 21.17]

This vessel was today adorned with every precious stone, that is, with every prerogative of heavenly gifts. She who bore the Creator and Redeemer of all received the reward of the saints. And so, regarding this vessel adorned with every precious stone, there is a **concordance** in the book of Esther, where it says that

*When Esther was to go in to the king, she sought not women's ornaments, but whatsoever Egeus the eunuch the keeper of the virgins had in mind, he gave her to adorn her. For she was exceeding fair; and her incredible beauty made her appear agreeable and amiable in the eyes of all. So she was brought to the chamber of king Assuerus, and the king loved her more than all the women; and he set the royal crown on her head*. [Esth 2.15,16,17]

Esther means 'concealed', Egeus 'religious' and Assuerus 'blessedness'. Esther is the blessed Virgin Mary, who lay hidden, enclosed on every side, when the angel found her in her hiding-place. Egeus, the guardian of virgins, is Jesus Christ. It is entirely appropriate that such a guardian of virgins be appointed, who is both 'Egeus', (religious), and a eunuch. He is religious yet festive, so as not to sadden the spirit of the faint-hearted; and a eunuch, so as to preserve and not corrupt the purity of virgins. These two characteristics are well conjoined; for it often happens that proper affection is loosened by mirth, or that chaste affection is accompanied by too much severity.

Christ showed both these qualities, to prove himself a suitable guardian of virgins. As Egeus, he gladly went to meet the women, saying *All hail!* [Mt 28.9]. But this was only after the Resurrection, by now in an immortal body. Previously he had behaved as a eunuch, so that we do not read that he had greeted a woman. Indeed, John says that the Apostles were astonished when he spoke to a woman [Jn 4.27]. This Egeus adorned our Esther, the blessed Virgin, even more lavishly because she had not sought women's ornaments. She did not want anyone, herself or anyone else, to adorn her; but she committed herself to the discretion of her guardian, by whom she was so fittingly adorned that today she is exalted above the angels.

This our Esther was 'exceeding fair' in the angelic salutation, 'of incredible beauty' in the

overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, and ‘agreeable to the eyes of all’ in the conception of the Son of God. After she had conceived the Son of God, her face shone with such brightness of grace that even Joseph himself could not gaze upon her countenance. No wonder! If, as the Apostle tells us:

*the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses, for the glory of his countenance, though it faded;* [2Cor 3.7]

and, in Exodus,

*Aaron and the children of Israel seeing the face of Moses horned* (i.e. shining) *from conversing with the word of God, were afraid to come near*; [Ex 34.29-30]

how much more was Joseph unable to gaze upon the face of the glorious Virgin, shining with the radiance of the true sun, whom she bore in her womb, and was afraid to draw near. The true sun, indeed, was covered by a cloud, and sent forth the rays of his light through the eyes and face of his mother. This face is full of all graces, pleasing to the eyes of the angels, and on which they desire to look, as it shines like the sun in its strength. The blessed Virgin is ‘amiable’, to be loved by all the earth, because she was found fit to receive the Saviour of all.

This our glorious Esther is today led by the hands of the angels to ‘the chamber of king Assuerus’, "the heavenly bride-chamber in which the King of kings, blessedness of the angels, sits upon a starry throne,"[22] Jesus Christ, who loved this glorious Virgin ‘above all other women’, her from whom he took flesh, who found grace and mercy in his sight above all women. O immeasurable dignity of Mary! O inexpressible sublimity of grace! O unsearchable depth of mercy! What grace so great, what mercy so great, was ever shown or could be shown to angel or to man, as that of the blessed Virgin, whom God the Father willed to be mother of his own Son, equal to him and begotten before all ages? It would be the greatest grace and honour for some poor little woman to have a son by the Emperor; truly, more excellent still was the grace of blessed Mary, who bore a Son to God the Father; and therefore she has been found worthy of being crowned this day in heaven.

So there is added: *And he set the royal crown on her head*. Solomon says in Canticles:

*Go forth, ye daughters of Sion, and see king Solomon in the diadem*

*wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals*. [Cant 3.11]

Because blessed Mary crowned the Son of God with the diadem of flesh on the day of his espousals, the day of his conception, when the divine nature was united to human nature, like a bridegroom to a bride, in the bride-chamber of that same Virgin: therefore this same Son has crowned his mother today with the crown of heavenly glory. Go forth, then! See the mother of Solomon wearing the crown wherewith her Son crowned her on

the day of her Assumption! She is well called: *a vessel of solid gold, adorned with every precious stone*.

4. There follows: *And as an olive tree budding forth*.

There is the olive-tree; its fruit, the olive; and its juice, olive oil. The olive-tree first puts forth a sweet-scented flower, from which comes the olive. The olive is first green, then red, and finally ripe. Blessed Anna was like the olive-tree, from which blossomed the white flower, inexpressibly sweet-scented, which is blessed Mary. Mary was 'green' in the Conception and Nativity of the Son of God. 'Green' is that which retains its strength. The blessed Virgin remained green in the conception and birth of the Saviour, inasmuch as she retained the strength of her virginity: she remained a virgin before and after childbirth. She was 'red' in the Passion of her Son, which 'pierced her own soul' [Lk 2.35]. She became ripe in the Assumption we celebrate today, budding forth, full of joy in the blessedness of heavenly glory.

And so, rejoicing with her in joy, we sing in the Introit of today's Mass: *Let us all rejoice in the Lord*, etc. In this Mass the Gospel reading is: *Jesus entered a certain village* [Lk 10.38]. The Latin '*castellum'* or 'castle' is related to 'chaste', that which 'castrates' lust. The enemy outside, who suddenly assails the castle, does not let those who live in it grow slack from inactivity, or become corrupted by indulgence. The suddenness of the assault on the castle cuts away any inclination towards lust. Note that a castle is a place surrounded by a wall, with a tower in the middle. Blessed Mary is a 'castle', and because she shone with the brightness of utter chastity, the Lord entered into her. The wall that fortified her, surrounding the tower, was virginity. The tower that defended the wall was her humility. The word tower suggests something straight and tall. The humility of blessed Mary stood straight and tall: straight, because she looked only towards him who looked upon her lowliness; tall, because at her humble words, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord*, she became the Queen of heaven. This Virgin was both Martha and Mary. She was Martha when she wrapped the child in bands, laid him in the manger, suckled him at her breast full of heavenly milk, fled with him into Egypt and came back again. She was Mary when, as Luke tells us:

*she kept all these words, pondering them in her heart*. [Lk 2.19]

**(A sermon on the same text: *And a cypress-tree rearing itself on high*.)**

5. There follows: *And a cypress rearing itself on high*.

Blessed Mary, like a cypress, raised herself on high above the height of all the angels. There is a **concordance** to this in Ezekiel:

*And above the firmament that was over the heads of the living creatures was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of the sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as of the appearance of a man above upon it.* [Ezek 1.26]

In the four living creatures are signified all the saints, adorned with the four virtues, instructed by the teaching of the four Gospels. In the firmament we see the angelic powers, made firm by the power of the Almighty. In the throne we see the blessed Virgin Mary, in whom the Lord humbled himself when he took flesh from her. In the Son of Man, we see Jesus Christ, the Son of God and man. And so, in the heavenly glory that is above the head of the living creatures (all the saints), there is a firmament (the angels). Above the angels there is a throne (the blessed Virgin), and upon the throne is the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. Regarding the throne, see the Gospel: *When the crowds were pressing upon Jesus* [Pentecost V]. For the sapphire stone, see the Gospel for the Annunciation: *I will be as the dew*.

We ask you then, our Lady, great Mother of God, lifted high above the choirs of angels, to fill the cup of our heart with heavenly grace; to make it gleam with the gold of wisdom; to make it solid with the power of your virtue; to adorn it with the precious stone of virtues; to pour upon us, O blessed olive-tree, the oil of your mercy to cover the multitude of our sins. By you may we be found fit to be raised to the height of heavenly glory, and to be blessed with the blessed; by the power of Jesus Christ your Son, who this day has raised you above the choirs of angels, crowned you with the diadem of his kingdom, and set you upon the throne of eternal light. To him be honour and glory through endless ages. Let the whole Church say: Amen. Alleluia.

NOTES

[1] Antony seems to count this as a sermon distinct from that on the Annunciation. I have therefore given it a separate heading below, although the Editorial numbering of the paragraphs continues from the previous section.

[2] cf. BELETHUS, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, 149 (*De nativitate beatae Mariae*);

PL 202.152

[3] ADAM OF ST VICTOR, Sequence "*Salve Mater Salvatoris"*, 57-62; PL 196.1504

[4] BERNARD, *In Dominica infra octavam Assumptionis B.M.V*., 7; PL 183.432-433

[5] AUGUSTINE, *Regula*, 6; PL 32.1381

[6] BERNARD, *In Nativitate B.V.M.,* 6; PL 183.440-441

[7] BERNARD, *In Adventu Domini, sermo* 2,2; PL 183.41-42. Also the three following quotations

[8] Abbot ERNALDUS, *De laudibus B.V.M*.; PL 189.1726

[9] Abbot GUERRICUS, *In Nativitate B.V.M. sermo* 1,3; PL 185.201

[10] BERNARD, *In Cantica sermo* 13,3; PL 183.835

[11] BERNARD, *In Cantica sermo* 42.8; PL 183.991

[12] PETRUS COMESTOR, *Historia Scholastica, liber Exodi*, 52; PL 198.1173-4

[13] AUGUSTINE, *In Ioannis ev. tr*. VIII,9; PL 35.1455

[14] cf. ARISTOTLE, *De historia animalium*, IX, 7; PLINY, *Naturalis Historia* X,52

[15] Author unknown

[16] PUBLIUS SYRUS, *Sententiae*, 155

[17] cf. WALTHER, *Carmina* 14920b: "*Miserarum rerum porta est sapientia*"

[18] A reference to the patriarchs freed from ‘Limbo’

[19] P. COMESTOR, *Historia Scholastica, liber Genesis*, 1; PL 198.1055

[20] WALTHER, *Carmina*, 4926; SENECA, *Epistola* 1

[21] BERNARD, *In vigilia Nativitatis Domini, sermo* 1,5; PL 183.89

[22] ROMAN BREVIARY, Feast of the Assumption, 2nd antiphon at Lauds.

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## THE FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

1. At that time: *There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled*. [Lk 2.1]

In this Gospel three things are noted: the enrolment of the world, the birth of the Saviour, and the announcement to the shepherds. With God's help, we shall say something about each of these, briefly and clearly.

[THE ENROLMENT OF THE WORLD]

2. The enrolment of the world, as it says: *There went out a decree*. Note that in this first clause there is moral teaching, about how anyone who wants to repent of the sins he has committed should first take a census of his life in contrition, and afterwards hasten to confession.

So it says: *There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus*. Caesar means 'possessor of the chief place', and Augustus is 'standing with dignity'. He represents almighty God, the owner of the whole of creation; as in Isaiah 66:

*My hand made all these things*; [Is 66.2]

and Job 9:

*Under whom they stoop that bear up the world*, [Job 9.13]

meaning the prelates of the Church and the princes of the world who bear its weight. God stands with dignity, because, as Daniel 7 says:

*Thousands of thousands ministered to him,*

*and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before him*. [Dan 7.10]

He is said to 'stand' when he gives help to his people, and to 'sit' when he passes

judgement; and in either case he has dignity, glory and nobility. This our Emperor sends out his decree every day, by means of his heralds who are the preachers of the Church, so that the whole world may be enrolled. We speak of the 'globe', because the earth is round and the encircling Ocean flows round it and sets its bounds. The 'globe' is also human life, which comes full circle as Genesis 3 tells:

*Earth thou art, and to the earth thou shalt return*. [Gen 3.19]

Each man must review this entire globe, recalling in bitterness of soul the things he did in childhood, in adolescence, in his youth and in his age. Note that it says 'the whole world', implying that the record includes sins of thought, word and deed, things done and things left undone, together with their circumstances. This is reinforced when we note that the word used means not just 'written down', but 'described', recorded in all the variety of their manner and circumstances.

*This enrolling was first made by Cyrinus, the governor of Syria* [Lk 2.2]. Cyrinus means 'heir', and he is the penitent, who is *heir of God and fellow-heir with Christ* [Rom 8.17], who says, *My inheritance is goodly to me* [Ps 15.6]. He makes the first census of his sins when he firstly in contrition makes a detailed examination of what he has done or left undone. He is 'governor of Syria' (meaning 'sublimity') because he has mastered pride and arrogance. Job 40 says of the devil:

*He beholdeth every high thing. He is king over all the children of pride*. [Job 41.25]

What more laudable governorship can there be, than to be in control of oneself and to humble one's own pride?

3. *And all went* [Lk 2.3]. You see here the right order of penitence: first, to examine oneself; and then go to confession. *They all went to be enrolled*. Alas! How few go today! Jeremiah 1 bewails:

*The ways of Sion mourn, because there are none that come to the solemn feast*. [Lam 1.4]

There was only *Joseph*, the true penitent, *of the house and family of David*, who was truly penitent, and to whose house the Lord promised in Zechariah 13;

*in that day there shall be a fountain open to the house of David*. [Zech 13.1]

The fountain of divine mercy stands open to the congregation of the penitent,

*for the washing of the sinner and the unclean woman*, [ibid]

that is, purging both manifest and hidden sins in them. This Joseph *went up from Galilee*

(which means 'a wheel', and refers to the aforementioned examination of his life), *out of the city of Nazareth* ('flower'). After the flower is the fruit, indeed from the first comes the second. In the same way contrition should be followed by confession, so that confession is as it were the fruit of contrition, together with absolution and reconciliation. And note that Joseph went up *to be enrolled with Mary his espoused wife, who was with child*. Mary means 'bitter sea', and she signifies the double bitterness with which the penitent should go up to Judea ('confession'), wherein is the city of David *which is called Bethlehem* ('house of bread'). This is the food of tears, as is said:

*My tears have been my bread*, etc. [Ps 41.4]

There is a **concordance** to this in Isaiah 15:

*By the ascent of Luith they shall go up weeping,*

*and in the way of Oronaim they shall lift up a cry of destruction*. [Is 15.5]

Here is the 'bitter sea'. Luith means 'cheeks' or 'jaws', Oronaim is 'the cleft of their sadness'. The weeper, i.e. the penitent, goes up to confession bedewed with tears, which go up from his cheeks to God, as Ecclesiasticus 35 says:

*Do not the widow's tears run down the cheek,*

*and her cry against him that causeth them to fall?*

*For from the cheek they go up even to heaven:*

*and the Lord that heareth will be pleased with them*. [Ecclus 35.18-19]

The 'cleft of sadness' is the sorrow of a contrite heart, from which should proceed the cry of confession which the penitent should raise, so as to confess everything nakedly and openly.

4. And note that he goes up with Mary who is with child. The soul is made pregnant with a two-fold bitter sorrow by the fear of God, as Isaiah 26 says:

*As a woman with child, when she draweth near the time of her delivery,*

*is in pain and crieth out in her pangs:*

*so are we become from thy face, O Lord* (or according to another translation: *from thy fear*).

*We have conceived and have been as it were in labour,*

*and have brought forth the spirit of salvation*. [cf. Is 26.17-18]

The face of Christ, when he comes to judgement, impregnates the soul with holy fear, that it may conceive and bring forth the spirit of salvation.

[THE BIRTH OF THE SAVIOUR]

5. The birth of the Saviour: *And it came to pass that when they were there* [Lk 2.6]. Where? In the house of bread; and Mary is the house of bread. The bread of angels has become the milk of little ones, that the little ones may become angels.

*Suffer the little children to come unto me*, [Mk 10.14]

*that they may suck and be filled with the breasts of her consolations*. [Is 66.11]

Note that milk is sweet to the taste and pleasant to look at. In the same way, as the Golden Mouth says, Christ draws men to himself by his sweetness, as a magnet draws iron, saying in Ecclesiasticus 24:

*They that eat me shall yet hunger:*

*and they that drink me shall yet thirst*. [Ecclus 24.29]

He is pleasing to look at, for *the angels long to gaze on him* [1Pt 1.12].

*Her days were accomplished that she should be delivered* [Lk 2.6]. See, here is the fulness of time, the day of salvation, the year of goodness [cf. Gal 4.4; 2Cor 6.2; Ps 64.12]. From the fall of Adam until the coming of Christ, there was an empty time. Jeremiah says:

*I beheld the earth, and lo it was void and nothing* [Jer 4.23]

because the devil had wholly laid it waste. It was a day of pain and weakness, as the Psalm says:

*Thou hast turned all his couch in his sickness*, [Ps 40.4]

an accursed year, as Genesis 3 says:

*Cursed is the earth in thy work*; [Gen 3.17]

but today, the days are accomplished that she should be delivered. From the fulness of this day we have all received, and so the Psalm says:

*We shall be filled with the good things of thy house*. [Ps 64.5]

To you, O blessed Virgin, be praise and glory, for today we are filled with the goodness of your house, that is, of your womb. We, who were empty before, are full; we who were sick are healthy; we who were cursed are blessed, because as Canticles 4 says: *Thy fruits are paradise* [Cant 4.13].

6. So there follows: *And she brought forth her firstborn son*. What goodness! What a paradise! Run, then, you famished, you avaricious and usurious people to whom money is dearer than God, and *buy without money and without price* [Is 55.1] the grain of wheat which the Virgin has brought fort this day from the storehouse of her womb. She brought forth a son. What son? God the Son of God. "O happiest of the happy, who has given a Son to God the Father."[1] What an honour it would be for some poor woman to give a son to a mortal Emperor! How far, far greater the glory of the Virgin, who gave a Son to God the Father! She brought forth her son. "The Father gave deity, the mother humanity; the Father gave majesty, the mother weakness."[2] She brought forth her son, Emmanuel, God-with-us. *Who then is against us?* [Rom 8.31] Isaiah 59 speaks of *A helmet of salvation upon his head* [Is 59.17]. This helmet is his humanity, upon the head of his divinity. The head is hidden beneath the helmet, the divinity beneath humanity. There is no cause for fear. Victory belongs to our side, because God in armour is with us! Thanks to you, O glorious Virgin, because through you God is with us. She brought forth his firstborn son, begotten of the Father before all worlds, *first begotten from the dead, first begotten among many brothers* [cf. Col 1.18; Rom 8.29].

7. There follows: *And she wrapped him up in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger* [Lk 2.7]. O poverty! O humility! The Lord of all is wrapped in a scrap of cloth! The King of angels lies down in a stable! Blush, insatiable avarice! Be ashamed, human pride! She wrapped him in cloth. Note that Christ is wrapped in cloth both at the beginning and at the end of his life. Mark 15 says:

*Joseph bought fine linen, and taking him down wrapped him up in the fine linen*. [Mk 15.46]

Happy the man who ends his life in baptismal innocence. The old Adam, when he was cast out of paradise, was clad in animal skins, which become more discoloured the more they are washed, and represents the fleshly nature of Adam and his race. The new Adam is wrapped in linen, whose whiteness represents the purity of his mother, the innocence that comes from Baptism, and the glory of the general Resurrection.

*And she laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn*. [Lk 2.7]

See here, as Proverbs 5 says:

*The dearest hind, and most agreeable fawn*. [Prov 5.19]

Natural History tells that the female deer gives birth at the roadside. In the same way, the blessed Virgin gave birth at a roadside inn, where many roads meet.

[THE ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE SHEPHERDS]

8. The announcement to the shepherds:

*And there were in the same country shepherds watching and keeping the night-watches over their flock*. [Lk 2.8]

Keeping watch may be a matter of sitting up at night, or standing guard by day; that is why the ancient Romans used to divide the night between four ‘watches’, who took it in turns to guard the City. The night stands for our present life, in which we walk about as in the deceiving night. We do not see ourselves (our consciences) as one to another. Our feet (our minds’ affections) often stumble. The man who wants to keep good watch over his city must be on the alert throughout the four watches of the night.

The first watch is uncleanness in which we were born.

The second watch is the malice of our deliberate wrong-doing.

The third watch is the misery of our earthly pilgrimage.

The fourth watch is the remembrance of death.

In the first watch a man must stay alert, so as to have a low opinion of himself; in the second, so as to afflict himself; in the third, so as to weep; in the fourth, so as to fear. Happy those shepherds who keep the night-watches in this way, for they are providing their flock with an excellent defence! Note that the shepherd keeps watch for two reasons: so that the thief may not steal, and so that the wolf may not devour. We are all shepherds, and our flock is the multitude of our good and simple thoughts and desires. We must keep careful watch over this flock, in the way mentioned, so that the thief (the devil) may not steal by suggesting sin; and the wolf (carnal appetite) may not devour by consent to sin. To all those keeping watch like this, the joy of the Nativity is announced today.

9. So there follows: *And the angel said to them: Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy. For this day a Saviour is born to you*, etc. [Lk 2.10-11]

There is a **concordance** to this in Genesis 21:

*Isaac was born; and Sara said: God hath made a laughter for me.*

*Whosoever shall hear of it will laugh with me*. [Gen 21.5-6]

Sara means ‘princess’ or ‘a coal’. She represents the glorious Virgin, our princess and Queen, set on fire like a coal by the Holy Spirit. Today, God has made a laughter for her, because from her is born our mirth. *I bring you good tidings of great joy*, for laughter is born, Christ is born. This is what we have heard today from the angel: *Whoever shall hear of it will laugh with me*. Let us laugh together, and rejoice together with the blessed Virgin, because God has made a laughter for us, that is, a cause for laughter and rejoicing for her and in her: *Today a Saviour is born to you*. If anyone were on the brink of death, or imprisoned in dungeon deep, and the news were brought to him: "Behold, he who shall save you is here"- would he not laugh? Would he not rejoice? He would indeed! So let us rejoice with a pure conscience and unfeigned charity, because today is born for us the Saviour who has rescued us from the devil's power and from the Pit of Hell.

10. The sign whereby we may find this joy is given in the words that follow:

*This shall be a sign unto you: You shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger*. [Lk 2.12]

Note these two things: humility and poverty. Happy the man who receives this sign on his forehead and in his hand (that is, in word and deed). What do the words, *You shall find the infant*, mean, if not: You will find wisdom babbling, power made weak, majesty laid low, the immense made small, the rich made poor, the Lord of angels lying in a stable, and the Food of angels made like the fodder of animals, the unlimited confined to a narrow manger? This, then, will be a sign to you, so that you do not perish like the Egyptians or the people of Jericho.

And so, *glory be to God the Father on high, and in earth peace to men of good will*, for the Word Incarnate, for the Virgin giving birth, and for the Saviour being born. May he who is blessed for ever deign to bestow that same glory on us. Amen.

[AN ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

11. *A child is born to us, and a son is given to us,*

*and the government is upon his shoulder:*

*and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty,*

*the Father of the world to come, the Prince of peace*. [Is 9.6]

This is in Isaiah 9; above, in chapter 7, he had said:

*Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son:*

*and his name shall be called Emmanuel*. [Is 7.14]

that is, God-with-us. This God is made a little child for us, is born for us today. There are many reasons why Christ is called a little child; and for briefness' sake here is just one: if you hurt a child, make him cry, or smack him; but then show him a flower, a rose or something like that, and after showing it give it to him- then he will not remember the hurt, he will put away his indignation and run to embrace you. In the same way, if you offend Christ by mortal sin, or inflict any kind of injury on him, but then offer him the flower of contrition or the rose of tearful confession ("Tears are the soul's blood")[3], then he will not remember your offences, he will take away your guilt and run to embrace and kiss you. So Ezekiel 18 says:

*But if the wicked do penance for all the sins which he hath committed,*

*I will not remember all his iniquities*. [Ezek 18.21,22]

And Luke 15 says of the prodigal son:

*His father saw him and was moved with compassion;*

*and running to him fell upon his neck and kissed him*. [Lk 15.20]

And in II Kings 14 it says that David received Absalom to his grace, and kissed him, though he had killed his brother [cf. 2Kg(Sm) 14.33]. *A child is born to us*, then.

And what use to us is the birth of this child? Much indeed, and in every way. Hear Isaiah 11:

*The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp:*

*And the weaned child shall thrust his hand into the den of the basilisk.*

*They shall not hurt, nor shall they kill in all my holy mountain*. [Is 11.8-9]

The basilisk ('*basileus'* or king of serpents) is the devil; and also the asp. His hole and den are the hearts of the wicked. On these, our little child puts his hand, when by the power of his divinity he draws out the devil from them. So Job 26 says:

*His obstetric hand brought forth the winding serpent*. [Job 26.13]

A mid-wife's job is to bring the child out of darkness into the light; so Christ with his powerful hand pulls the ancient serpent out of the dark hearts of the wicked, so that he and his minions may do no harm to the body without permission (they could not enter the swine without permission [cf. Mk 5.13]), and may not kill souls with eternal death. Before the coming of the Saviour, the exercised power over the human race, to foully harass the bodies of men and pull down souls to misery in hell. *In all my holy mountain* refers to the Church, my holy place in which I dwell.

12. There follows: *and a son is given to us*. There is a **concordance** to this in II Kings 21:

*There was a third battle in Gob against the Philistines, in which Adeodatus the son of Forest an embroiderer of Bethlehem slew Goliath the Gethite*. [2Kg(Sm) 21.19]

Note that the first battle was in the desert: *Jesus was led into the desert*, etc [Mt 4.1]; the second was in the open field (that is, in his public ministry): *Jesus was casting out a devil* [Lk 11.14]; the third was on the Cross, nailed to which he defeated the 'Philistines' (i.e. the spiritual powers). This third battle took place 'in Gob' (which means a lake or hollow) referring to the wounds of the Redeemer, and especially to the wound in his side, from which flowed the twin streams of our redemption. In this low-lying area Jesus is given to us simply by the mercy of God the Father, to be our champion. He is 'son of Forest', because, as Mark says, *he was in the desert with the beasts*; or because he was crowned with thorns. He is 'an embroiderer', having adorned with the sevenfold gifts of grace the 'coat of many colours', human nature, which he made ready for himself in the Virgin's womb. He is 'of Bethlehem', because he was born of the Virgin this very day in Bethlehem. Alternatively, he is 'son of Forest' in his Passion, 'an embroiderer' in the general Resurrection (when he will clothe us in a robe adorned with four gifts), and 'of Bethlehem' in the eternal banquet. This our champion, though knocked down at the low point of his Passion, in turn struck down Goliath of Geth (the devil).

13. So there follows: *and the government is upon his shoulder*. There is a **concordance** to this in Genesis 22:

*Abraham took the wood for the holocaust, and laid it upon Isaac his son*. [Gen 22.6]

It says in John 19:

*And bearing his own cross he went forth to that place which is called Calvary*. [Jn 19.17]

How great the humility of our Redeemer! How great the patience of our Saviour! Alone, for all of us, he carried the wood on which he was hung, on which he was crucified, on which he died. As Isaiah 57 says:

*The just perisheth and no man layeth it to heart*. [Is 57.1].

The government is upon his shoulder; and so the Father says in Isaiah 22:

*I will lay the key of the house of David upon his shoulder*. [Is 22.22]

The ‘key’ is the Cross of Christ, which opens for us the gate of heaven. The Cross, note, is called both ‘key’ and ‘government’: a ‘key’ because it opens heaven to the elect; ‘government’ because by its power it thrusts the demons down to hell.

14. There follows: *and his name shall be called Wonderful* (in his Nativity), *Counsellor* (in his preaching), *God* (in his working of miracles), *the Mighty* (in his Passion), *the Father of the world to come* (in his Resurrection). When he rose, he left us the sure hope of rising ourselves, as it were an inheritance for his children after him. He will be *the Prince of peace* in eternity. May he, the blessed God, graciously grant us this. Amen.

[A MORAL SERMON]

15. *A child is born to us*. Morally. Matthew 18 says of this little child:

*Unless you be converted and become as this little child*, etc. [Mt 18.3]

Note that when a little child wakes up during the night, he cries; when he is naked, he is not embarrassed; when he is hurt, he runs to his mother’s arms. When his mother wants to wean him from her milk, she puts a bitter ointment on her breasts. He is inexperienced in the world's malice, he does not know how to sin. He does no harm to his neighbour, he does not bear a grudge, he hates no-one. He does not seek riches, he is not bedazzled by worldly glory, he is not impressed by human dignity. The ‘little child’ is the penitent who is converted, who was previously puffed up with pride of heart, given to boastful words, ostentatious in worldly wealth. Now he a little child, humble and of little account in his own eyes. When he awakes to the remembrance of his former life, he weeps bitterly. He is not ashamed to be naked and poor for Christ’s sake, nor to strip himself bare in confession. When he suffers an injury, he does no hurt in return, but has recourse to the Church and pours out his prayer for those who persecute him or speak ill of him. Mother Church weans him from her milk when she puts the ointment of bitter penance upon the breast of carnal pleasure which he used to suck. The other points are obvious, and need no comment.

So, when some worldly person is converted and becomes one of Christ's little ones, we ought to burst forth in joy of heart with exultant voice, and say: *A child is born to us!* So John 16 says:

*A woman* (Holy Church),

*when she is in labour* (in preaching or in showing compassion to sinners), *hath sorrow*;

*but, when she hath brought forth* (by contrition and the sinner's confession)

*the child* (the newly converted),

*she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world*. [Jn 16.21]

Of John ('the grace of God') was said: *Many shall rejoice in his birth* [Lk 1.14].

16. *And a son is given to us*. Thanks be to God! Because from a slave of the world and of the devil we have derived a son of God. Such a one says in the Psalm:

*The Lord hath said to me: Thou art my son;*

*this day have I begotten thee*, [Ps 2.7]

by grace: who were yesterday a slave of guilt; and because you are a son,

*Ask of me, and I will give thee the Gentiles* (rebellious thoughts) *for thine inheritance,*

*and the utmost parts of the earth* (your bodily senses) *for thy possession*; [Ps 2.8]

so that you may prevail over both. *A son*, as referred to in Genesis 49:

*Joseph is a growing son, a growing son and comely to behold*. [Gen 49.22]

He is 'growing' in virtue of his poverty; as Joseph says in Genesis 41:

*God hath made me to grow in the land of my poverty*. [Gen 41.52]

He is 'comely to behold' by his humility; so that Genesis 29 says of Rachel (meaning 'sheep', that is 'humble'):

*she was well favoured and of a beautiful countenance*. [Gen 29.17]

He is 'given to us'; for, *He was dead and is come to life again, was lost and is found* [Lk 15.24]. For what purpose is he given and found? Surely, for the labour of penance.

17. So there follows: *And the government is upon his shoulder*. There is a **concordance** to this in the last but one chapter of Genesis:

*Issachar shall be a strong ass lying down in the borders.*

*He saw rest that it was good: and the land that it was excellent.*

*And he bowed his shoulder to carry*. [Gen 49.14-15]

Issachar (meaning ‘man of reward’) is the penitent who serves manfully for an eternal reward, and so is called ‘a strong ass’. Ecclesiasticus 33 says of him:

*Fodder and a wand and a burden are for an ass*. [Ecclus 33.25]

Fodder of any kind, so that he does not grow weak; the wand of poverty, so that he does not get skittish and kick with his hoof; the burden of obedience, so that he does not become unused to labour. The medicine of penance is compounded from these three ingredients.

He lies down ‘in the borders’. The two borders are the entry and the exit of life. He lies down in these, because he abases himself in the first and weeps for himself in the second. The foolish man does not live ‘on the borders’, but in the middle. So Judges 5 says:

*Why dwellest thou between two borders,*

*that thou mayest hear the bleatings of the flock?* [Jg 5.16]

Between birth and death there is only the vanity of the world. The ‘flocks’ are the movements of the flesh, and their ‘bleating’ is their allurement, which the man who takes his ease in the vanity of the world hears. But the penitent man, living on the borders, lifts up the eyes of his mind and sees the repose of happiness and glory, that it is good in the glorification of the body; and he sees the land of eternal stability, that it is very good in the contemplation of the Trinity. He bows his shoulder to bear government, namely the yoke of penance whereby he governs both himself and his temptations. So Ecclesiasticus 6 says: *Bow down thy shoulder and bear her* [Ecclus 6.26].

18. There follows: *and his name shall be called Wonderful*, etc. Note that in these six words is summed up the whole perfection of the penitent or just man. He is ‘wonderful’ in his thorough and frequent self-examination, and he sees wonders in the deep places of his heart. Thus Job was ‘wonderful’, because the whole world wonders at his patience. Chapter 7 says:

*I will not spare my mouth, I will speak in the affliction of my spirit:*

*I will talk with the bitterness of my soul*. [Job 7.11]

Such affliction of spirit and bitterness of soul leave nothing unexamined, when they sift and search everything to the bottom.

He is ‘counsellor’ in the spiritual and bodily needs of his neighbour, as Job 29 says:

*I was an eye to the blind and a foot to the lame*. [Job 29.15]

The blind man is one who does not look into his conscience; the lame man is one who deviates from the straight road of justice. The just man gives counsel to both, because he is ‘an eye’ to the former, instructing him so that he can recognise the defects of his own conscience; and ‘a foot’ to the latter, supporting him and guiding him to put his steps in the way of justice.

There follows: ‘God’. The just man is called ‘God’ figuratively, in the rule over subjects. Thus in Exodus 7 the Lord says to Moses:

*I have appointed thee the God of Pharao;*

and in Exodus 22:

*If the thief be not known, the master of the house shall be brought to the gods* (i.e the priests); *and shall swear that he did not lay his hand upon his neighbour’s goods*. [Ex 22.8]

And again: *I have said: You are gods* [Ps 81.6].

Alternatively, ‘God’ in Greek is ‘*Theos’*, that is ‘He who sees’, since ‘*theoreo’* means ‘I see’; ‘*theo’* also means ‘I run’, because he traverses everything. The penitent is called ‘God’ because he sees and runs: he sees the things that are above in contemplation, and so he runs towards the goal set before him in the race of penitence.

He is ‘mighty’ in fighting against temptation; as in Judges 14:

*A young lion met Samson, raging and roaring; and the spirit of the Lord came upon Samson, and he tore the lion as he would have torn a kid in pieces*. [Jg 14.5-6]

The young lion is the spirit of pride, or lust, or something of the sort. It rages in its vehemence, it roars in its cunning. It appears suddenly and attacks with force. But when the spirit of contrition, of divine love or fear, falls on the penitent, he tears the spirit of pride (represented by the lion), as he tears the spirit of lust (represented by the goat-kid, because it stinks) in pieces, because he destroys it utterly in itself and in its concomitants.

He is ‘Father of the world to come’ in preaching by word and example. So the Apostle says:

*My little children, of whom I am in labour again, until Christ be formed in you*. [Gal 4.19]

And:

*By the Gospel of Christ I have begotten you,* [1Cor 4.15],

namely to eternal life.

He is 'Prince of peace' in the tranquil dwelling together of mind and body. So Job 5:

*The beasts of the earth* (i.e. the motions of your flesh) *shall be at peace with thee:*

*and thou shalt know that thy tabernacle is in peace*. [Job 5.23-24]

And chapter 11:

*Being buried* (i.e. hidden from the world in contemplation) *thou shalt sleep secure.*

*Thou shalt rest, and there shall be none to make thee afraid*. [Job 11.18-19]

May he who is blessed for ever be pleased to grant us this. Amen.

NOTES

1 ARISTOTLE, *De somno et vigilia*, 3

2 AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* 351,4,7; PL 39.1512

3 JEROME, *Letter to the monk Rusticus*, 125,8; PL 22.1076

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## THE FESTIVAL SERMONS

## SAINT STEPHEN

1. At that time: *Jesus said to the Jewish crowd: Behold, I send to you prophets*, etc. [Mt 23.34]

There are two things noted in this Gospel: the persecution of the just and the comparison of Christ to the mother hen.

[THE PERSECUTION OF THE JUST]

2. The persecution of the just: *Behold, I send*, etc. In this first clause we note the moral lesson, how worldly and carnal people destroy in themselves, or drive away from themselves, the manifold inspiration of divine grace.

*He said therefore to the Jewish crowd*. The 'Jews', who loved transitory things and worked only for them, stand for worldly people, devoted to the flesh, who (as is said in the book of Judges, ch. 12) are unable to pronounce 'Shibboleth' (which means 'ear' or 'grain'), but say 'Sibboleth' (meaning 'straw'). They chase after straw, and become straw, which will be burnt up in the eternal fire.

He says: *Behold, I send to you prophets* [*and wise men and scribes*]. Note that in these three persons, the threefold inspiration of divine grace is implied. The 'prophets' are the fear of judgement and the dread of hell, which the Lord sends to the sinful soul, to prophesy to it the terrible judge and the avenging fire. So Nahum 1 says:

*Who can stand before the face of his indignation?*

*And who shall resist in the fierceness of his anger?*

*His indignation is poured out like fire:*

*and the rocks are melted by him*. [Nah 1.6]

And Joel 2:

*Before the face thereof a devouring fire, and behind it a burning flame*. [Joel 2.3]

The Lord says of these two prophets, in Jeremiah 44:

*I sent to you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending, and saying:*

*Do not commit this abominable thing which I hate.*

*But they heard not nor inclined their ear, to turn from their evil ways*. [Jer 44.4-5]

The Lord is said to rise early and send prophets, when he mercifully strikes the soul sleeping in the night of sin, with the fear of judgement and the dread of hell. But the wretch will not receive the inspiration, nor turn the ear of obedience, so as to be converted from evil-doing to penitence.

The 'wise men' are those divine inspirations which order our thoughts, weigh our words, adorn our deeds, put our lives together and arrange everything in the right way. He who walks with these wise men, becomes wise himself. Ecclesiasticus 8 says of them:

*Despise not the discourse of the wise, and acquaint thyself with their proverbs;*

*learn of them doctrine and understanding*. [cf. Ecclus 8.9-10]

Glorious is their school, happy their teaching, praiseworthy their discipline; which instruct our behaviour and destroy vices.

The 'scribes' are the devotions of the mind, which write in the book of memory the uncleanness of our conception, the lowliness of our birth, the malice of our wickedness, the misery of our pilgrimage, the brevity of time and the remembrance of death. Read this scripture of truth. Study this book. In it, as Ezekiel 2 says, are 'lamentations, a song, and woe' [Ezek 2.9]; lamentations over the uncleanness of conception and lowliness of birth; a sad song about the malice of wickedness and the misery of pilgrimage; and woe concerning the brevity of time and the remembrance of death. See how the merciful and kind Lord daily sends to you prophets to strike you with sorrow, wise men to guide your behaviour, and scribes to record in your memory the state of your life.

3. But let us listen to how much evil the ungrateful Jews (that is, the lovers of the world) return for these benefits:

*And some of them you will put to death and crucify;*

*and some you will scourge in your synagogues*. [Mt 23.34]

Relate each term to each: they kill the prophets, crucify the wise men, and scourge the scribes. The proud and vainglorious oppose the prophets, the gluttonous and lustful the wise men, and the avaricious and usurers the scribes. Pride and vainglory kill in man the terror of judgement and the dread of hell: so that today Stephen says to the Jews in Acts 7:

*You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears* (pride and vainglory which are unwilling to understand or even hear, except for what pleases them), *you always resist the Holy Ghost, as your fathers did. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain those who foretold of the coming of the Just One*. [Ac 7.51-52]

And so they kill them in themselves, because they foretell the coming to judgement.

The gluttonous and lustful crucify and afflict the wise men; for they are corrupt in thought, lascivious in word, dissolute in deed, and loose in morals. They say, in Wisdom 2:

*Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments:*

*and let not the flower of the time pass by us.*

*Let us crown ourselves with roses, before they be withered:*

*let no meadow escape our riot*. [Wisd 2.7-8]

The avaricious and usurious scourge the scribes in the synagogues; that is, in their consciences wherein is the seat and synagogue of Satan [cf. Apoc 2.9,13]. The unhappy wretches pay no attention to the state of their life, its entry and its exit. In its entrance there is no purse or penny, at its exit only straw and sack-cloth. They are naked as they enter, and they leave wrapped in a short shroud. Where do they get all their possessions from? From robbery and fraud. So Habbakuk 2 says:

*Woe to him that heapeth together that which is not his own.*

*How long also doth he load himself with thick clay?* [Hab 2.6]

He is like the dung-beetle, which gathers much dung and with great labour makes a round ball; but in the end a passing ass steps on both beetle and ball, and in a moment destroys it and all it laboured so long over. In the same way the miser or usurer gathers long the dung of money, and labours long; but when he lest expects, it the devil chokes him. And so he gives his soul to the demons, his flesh to worms, and his money to his family.

4. There follows: *And you will persecute them from city to city* [Mt 23.34]. Alas! It is not

enough for the wretches to extinguish or drive out the inspiration of divine grace in themselves; but they must also persecute and expel it from those about them- children, wives and so on, as though from city to city! For instance: Suppose the son of a usurer is struck with fear of the judgement, or of the pains of hell, and resolves to live an honest life and bewail the misery of this life. If his father gets to hear of it, he persecutes this grace in him with all his power, and so for his daughter, his wife, his whole family.

*That upon you may come all the just blood* (the due vengeance for shedding blood)

*from the blood of Abel the just* (whose name means ‘strife’)

*even unto the blood of Zacharias* (‘remembrance of the Lord’)

*the son of Barachias* (‘blessing of the Lord’). [Mt 23.35]

See what evil deeds these murderers perform! They kill in themselves and in their families the strife of penance and the remembrance of the Lord’s Passion, which was given as a blessing by God the Father to the whole world.

*Whom you killed between the temple and the altar* (i.e. in the court of the temple).

Apocalypse 9 says of this:

*But the court which is without the temple cast out and measure it not;*

*because it is given unto the Gentiles* (i.e. those who live ‘gently’).[Apoc 11.2]

The temple stands for the Church triumphant, the altar for the Church militant, and the courtyard for worldly vanity wherein the memory of the Lord’s Passion is killed.

[THE COMPARISON WITH THE MOTHER HEN]

5. The comparison of Christ to a mother hen: *Jerusalem, Jerusalem* [Mt 23.37}. He weeps for men, not stones, with loving concern. *Thou that killest the prophets*, who announce the Lord of prophets, *and stonest them*. It is on account of these words that this Gospel is read today, when St Stephen was stoned by the Jews. When he argued with their hardness (‘stiff necked’, he called them), he had to endure the hardness of stones. Yet, "Patience rejoices in hard things".[1] "Yesterday the Lord was born, today the servant is stoned; yesterday the king was wrapped in swaddling cloths, today the soldier puts off his perishable garment; yesterday the Saviour lay in the manger, today Stephen takes his place in heaven."[2] His name means ‘rule’, or ‘crowned’, or ‘watchman’. He is our rule by his example: falling on his knees, he prayed for those who stoned him: *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge* [Ac 7.59]. He was crowned with his own blood, and gazed upon the Son of God: *I see the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of*

*God* [Ac 7.55].

There follows: *How often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldest not* [Mt 23.37]. It is as though he said, I wanted it, and you did not want it; and as often as I gathered by my ever efficacious will, even though you were unwilling, I did so, for you were always ungrateful.

(5b) Alternatively: the Lord rebukes the ungrateful soul: *Jerusalem, Jerusalem*. This is interpreted as ‘perfect fear’, (i.e. complete), or ‘he will fear perfectly’. A house is called ‘imperfect’ until it is completed. Note that he says ‘Jerusalem’ twice, because the unhappy soul, which, as said previously, kills the prophets in it, will fear two things: it sees above it the angry judge, and beneath it hell gaping and burning; and then it will fear perfectly. It does not fear now, however, because it is not concerned with those things that are for its peace.

*And stonest them that are sent unto thee*, that is, you drive away the inspirations and visitations of divine grace in hardness of heart. Isaiah 48 says:

*I know that thou art stubborn, and thy neck is as an iron sinew, and thy forehead is as brass*. [Is 48.4]

The iron sinew is inflexible pride (Augustine: "To stretch the neck is a sign of pride")[3], the brass forehead is irreverence (Ezekiel 3: *All the house of Israel are of a hard forehead and an obstinate heart* [Ezek 3.7]).

*How often would I have gathered together thy children, and thou wouldest not*. Note that man’s justification is perfected by two things: his own deliberation and divine inspiration; the Creator co-operates with his creature. So he requires our voluntary assent in the work of our justification, as he says in Isaiah 1:

*If you be willing and will hearken to me, you shall eat the good things of the land*. [Is 1.9]

When this work is forwarded, it is attributed to free will, as it is said: *If my people had heard me*, etc. [Ps 80.14].

If we do altogether nothing in this work, we ask for help in vain, and we falsely call him our helper. It is one thing to do, and another to help. What is ‘to help’ if not to co-operate with one who is working? That man understood that he was a helper and a co-operator in good, who said: *Be my helper and deliverer, O Lord, make no delay* [Ps 69.6]. Every day we are asked for his help when we proclaim in daily press: *Help us, O God, our saviour* [Ps 78.9]. It is clear then, that this work is perfected by a two things, wherein the Creator co-operates with his creature.

In this work, then, there is need for our own industry and divine grace. Vainly does one

strive with free will, if one is not supported by divine assistance. Our justification is brought to perfection by our own resolution and divine inspiration. To will only what is just, is already to be just. We are rightly called 'just' or 'unjust' solely from our will, however much we are helped to either by our work. So do what is yours to do by offering your will, and God will do what is his by infusing grace.

Note that neither angel, man nor devil can compel the free will, nor will God force it. But, O soul, he lovingly wishes that you gather your 'children' together (your affections, which are scattered among various worldly vices), so that you may live peaceably together in your house: you should freely offer yourself in this matter, and will it yourself.

6. *As the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings*. Note that the hen is made weak with the weakness of her chicks. She calls them to food so clamorously that she grows hoarse; shielding them with her wings, she bristles against the hawk for their sake. In the same way Christ, the Wisdom of the Father, was made weak for our weakness. Isaiah 53 says:

*We desired him; despised and the least* (i.e. most abject) *of men,*

*a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity*. [Is 53.2-3]

Whoever wants to comfort the afflicted must needs fell affection towards he afflicted. It says in the fourth book of Kings that Eliseus *bowed himself upon the child, and the child's flesh grew warm* [4(2)Kg 4.34]. Eliseus's bowing is Christ's Incarnation, from which we have received the warmth of faith, and recovered life. He called us to the food of his teaching, crying so loudly that *his jaws became hoarse* [Ps 68.4].

Note that he who is hoarse has no melody of voice, but sounds rough, and is not willingly listened to. So today, Christ's teaching has no flattering melody, it does not soothe sinners and promise them temporal things. It sounds rough, because it teaches them to afflict the flesh and despise the world; and so it is not readily listened to. So Job 29 complains:

*I called my servant, and he gave me no answer: I entreated him with my own mouth.*

*My wife hath abhorred my breath, and I entreated the children of my womb*. [Job 19.16-17]

Christ's 'wife' are the clergy, impregnated with his patrimony, who more than anyone abhor his breath (that is, his preaching), which goes out from his secret place; for, as Job says, *Wisdom is drawn out of secret places* [Job 28.18].

Further, to protect us he stretched out his arms like wings upon the Cross, and bristling with thorns he faced the devil, who schemed to seize us. The crown of thorns was like a

helmet on his head, the Cross like a shield on his arm, the nail like a club in his hand; and so armed he cast down our enemy. To him, then, be praise and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

7. *Thou shalt make a candlestick of beaten work of the finest gold: and the branches, the cups and the bowls and the lilies going forth from it*. *Six branches shall come out of the sides, three out of the one side and three out of the other*. [Ex 25.31-32]

*Thou shalt make a candlestick*, etc. Matthew 5 says:

*They do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house*.[Mt 5.15]

The grace of the Holy Spirit, a burning and shining light, was placed upon a candlestick, namely blessed Stephen; as Zechariah 4 says:

*I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, and its lamp upon the top of it*. [Zech 4.2]

This lamp, or candle, was not put under a bushel, worldly wealth, but gave light to all who were in the house, the Church. So Luke says in today's reading:

*Stephen, full of grace and fortitude, did great wonders and signs among the people*. [Ac 6.8]

This candlestick was 'of finest gold', referring to the gold of his poverty. At that time, as Genesis 2 says, *the gold of that land* (Hevilath, meaning 'bringing forth'), the primitive Church, *was the very finest* [Gen 2.12]. But alas! It is turned to rubbish! It was 'beaten', fashioned by hammer-blows. Blessed Stephen was shaped and fashioned by the striking stones, like hammer-blows, so as to embrace his enemies. So it says:

*They stoned Stephen, who cried with a loud voice, saying: Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*. [Ac 7.58-9]

There is a **concordance** to this in II Kings 21:

*They brought forth Naboth the Jezreelite without the city, and stoned him to death*, [3(1) Kg 21.13]

because he would not let his vineyard, the inheritance of his fathers, be turned into a garden of herbs. Blessed Stephen was stoned in the same way: *they cast him out of the city and stoned him*, because he withstood the Jews who wanted to turn the primitive

Church into a herb-garden, for the observance of ceremonies and their traditions.

8. There follows: *Six branches shall come out of the sides, three out of the one side and three out of the other*. The six branches of the candlestick denote six qualities of blessed Stephen, mentioned in the reading of today's Mass. These are: faith, as it is said: *They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit* [Ac 6.5], wherein it is noted that his faith was living and well-formed; grace and fortitude, as is added: *Full of grace and fortitude* [Ac 6.8]; wisdom and boldness in preaching: *They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit that spoke* [Ac 6.10], and again: *You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart*, etc. [Ac 7.51]; prayer for those stoning him, when he said*: Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*. He lived by faith, he grew strong by grace, he resisted by fortitude, he taught by wisdom, he refuted by boldness of spirit, he aided by prayer.

On these branches were cups, bowls and lilies. The hollowness of a cup represents humility of heart; the round bowls are care for one's brother's needs; the lilies are purity of body. See the gold candlestick in the tabernacle of the Lord, lighting the table of proposition, the Church or the faithful soul: Stephen the first martyr, decked with virtues, garlanded with his blood, triumphant in heaven. May his prayers lead us to eternal joys, and may he be blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

9. *Thou shalt make a candlestick of beaten work of the finest gold*. The candlestick stands for any faithful soul. The Lord spoke to Aaron of it in Numbers 8:

*When thou shalt place the seven lamps, let the candlestick be set up on the south side, that the lamps look over against the north, towards the table of the loaves of proposition*. [Num 8.2]

The seven lamps are the grace of the Holy Spirit, faith in the Word Incarnate, love of neighbour, the teaching of the divine word, the light of good example, a right intention of the mind, and constancy in resolution.

Of the first, Job 29 says:

*His lamp shined over my head, and I walked by his light in darkness*. [Job 29.3]

The light shines on the head when grace illuminates the mind, and then he sees clearly, amid the shadows of this present exile, where to put the 'foot' of action.

Of the second, Luke 15 says:

*What woman having ten groats, if she lose one groat, doth not light a candle and sweep the house and seek diligently until she find it?* [Lk 15.8]

The nine groats are the nine orders of angels; the tenth is Adam and his posterity, which were lost when he was cast out of paradise. But the ‘woman’, the Wisdom of God the Father, ‘lit a candle’ when he placed the light of his divinity into the frail clay of our humanity. And so he ‘swept the house’, the world and the underworld, until he found it.

Of the third, Proverbs 6 says:

*The commandment is a lamp, and the law a light,*

*and reproofs of instruction are the way of life*. [Prov 6.23]

*A new commandment I give you, that you love one another* [Jn 13.34]; that is the lamp. And 1 John 2:

*He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, but he that hateth is in darkness*.[1Jn 2.10-11]

The very light of love, on which all the Law and the prophets depend, is ‘the light’. *And reproofs of instruction are the way of life*, that is, to life. The Apostle says in Hebrews 12:

*All chastisement for the present indeed seemeth not to bring with it joy but sorrow* (that is the reproof’); *but afterwards it will yield to them that are exercised by it the most peaceable fruits of justice* (that is ‘the way of life’). [Heb 12.11]

Of the fourth, the Psalm says:

*Thy word is a lamp to my feet*, [Ps 118.105]

and the second Epistle of Peter:

*And we have the more firm prophetical word; whereunto you do well to attend, as to a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day-star arise in your hearts*. [2Pt 1.19]

Of the fifth, Luke says:

*Let your loins be girt, and lamps burning in your hands*. [Lk 12.35]

St Gregory[4] says: "We have lamps burning in our hands when by good deeds we show examples of light to our neighbours."

Of the sixth, Matthew says:

*The light of thy body is thy eye. If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome*. [Mt 6.22]

The eye is our intention, the body is our work. If our intention is simple, that is, without deviousness and deceit, our whole work will be lightsome, because it will be illumined by the lamp of right intention.

Of the seventh, Proverbs says in the last chapter, about the strong woman:

*Her lamp shall not be put out in the night*. [Prov 31.1]

This is as though to say, the darkness of the devil's temptation will not put out the light of the constant soul.

These seven 'lamps' should be set upon the soul, so that they may 'look over against the north', opposing the region of the devil, so that the soul illumined by them may see the snares of Satan and beware of them. They should also illuminate the 'table of the loaves of proposition', representing the outward demeanour of any faithful soul; from which, if the food of the soul be heavenly, it is set before all, being illuminated by the aforesaid lamps in the darkness of our present blindness.

And note that the Lord commands that this 'candlestick' be set up on the south side, not the west. The south side represents eternal life; as Habbakuk says, *God will come from the south* [Hab 3.3]. When the soul of any faithful sets itself to do something good, it 'sets itself up on the south side', so that whatever it does, it does not for empty show but for heavenly glory. So, *thou shalt make a candlestick*.

10. There follows: 'of beaten work'. The soul is shaped and fashioned with the hammer of contrition into the love of the Redeemer; it grows by blows, it stretches itself by sorrow, because "Patience rejoices in hard things."[5] There is something similar in Ecclesiasticus 20:

*A wise man shall advance himself with his words*. [Ecclus 20.29]

When he strikes himself with the word of self-accusation or confession, he advances himself in the love of God.

And because by the striking of contrition he comes to cleanness of heart, there is added, 'of finest gold'. Apocalypse 21 says of this:

*The city itself pure gold, like to clear glass*. [Apoc 21.18]

The soul of the just, the seat or city of wisdom, is called 'pure gold' because of its outstanding purity of thought; and if at some time (from the frailty of the human condition)

it receives something soiled, it immediately shows it in confession, like clear glass, and so it goes forward to the love of God and neighbour.

So there follows: *Six branches shall come out of the sides,* etc. The six branches of the candlestick are as it were the arms of love in the just man, with which the soul embraces God and neighbour. Of the arms with which it embraces God, Deuteronomy 6 and Luke 10 say: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength* [Dt 6.5; Lk 10.27]. Augustine[6] puts and explains it like this: "With all your heart, that is, by understanding without error; with all your mind, that is, by memory without forgetfulness; with all your soul, that is, by will without opposition."

The arms with which the soul embraces neighbour are these: forgiving the sinner, correcting the wanderer, feeding the hungry. From these proceed cups, bowls and lilies. The 'cup' is the grace of heavenly doctrine, from which friends drink and dearest friends are inebriated. This is the silver cup of Joseph, placed in the sack of Benjamin [cf. Gen 44.2,12], the heart of the just man. The bowl is the turning over of sin in confession; so Isaiah says:

*Take a harp*, (i.e. confession)

*go about the city*, (your mind or life, turning over everything, that nothing be hid)

*sing well*, (accusing yourself)

*sing many a song*, (blaming yourself and weeping for yourself)

*that thou mayest be remembered*. (in God's sight) [Is 23.16]

The minstrel sings at the rich man's door, so as to receive some reward. The lilies represent the clear and sweet dwelling together in angelic blessedness. *The beloved feeds among the lilies* [Cant 2.16], saying in Apocalypse 3: *He that shall overcome shall be clothed in white garments* [Apoc 3.5]. The Angel of the Resurrection appeared clad in a white robe; may he himself lead us to receive that robe, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] LUCAN, *Civil War*, IX,403

[2] cf. FULGENTIUS, *Sermo* 3,1; PL 65.729-30

[3] AUGUSTINE, *Confessiones* VII,7; PL 32.740

[4] GREGORY, *In evangelia Homilia* 13,1; PL 76.1124

[5] LUCAN, *Civil War*, IX, 403

[6] AUGUSTINE, quoted in GLOSS on Mt 22.37, and by P. LOMBARD, *Sententiae* dist 27,5

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## THE FESTIVAL SERMONS

## SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST

1. At that time: Jesus said to Peter: *Follow me*, etc. [Jn 21.19]

There are two things noted in this Gospel, the imitation of Christ and his love for his faithful.

[THE IMITATION OF CHRIST]

2. The imitation of Christ: *Follow me*. He said this to Peter; he says it also to each and every Christian: *Follow me*, naked after the naked, swiftly after the swift. So Jeremiah 3 says:

*Thou shalt call me father, and shalt not cease to walk after me.* [Jer 3.19]

Therefore, follow me, "put down your pack; for you cannot follow me as I run if you are burdened."[1] *I ran in thirst* [Ps 61.5], he says, namely for human salvation. Where did he run? To the Cross. Do you run after him, that as he did on your behalf, so you may bear your cross for yourself. So Luke 9 says:

*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself* (in renouncing his own will),

*and take up his cross* (in mortifying the flesh),

*daily* (i.e. continually),

*and so follow me*. [Lk 9.23].

So, then, *follow me*.

Alternatively, if you desire to come to me and find me, *follow me*- that is, seek me apart. So he says to the disciples in Mark 6:

*Come apart into a desert place and rest a little. For there were many coming and going;*

*and they had not so much as time to eat*. [Mk 6.31]

Alas! How many carnal affections and clamorous thoughts come and go through our heart, so that we have no time to eat the bread of eternal sweetness, for savouring interior contemplation. And so the kindly Master says, *Come apart* from the jostling crowd, *into a desert place*, the solitude of mind and body, *and rest a little*. Truly 'a little', for as is said in Apocalypse 8:

*There was silence in heaven, as it were for half an hour*. [Apoc 8.1]

*Who will give me wings like a dove*, etc. [Ps 54.7]

So Hosea 2 says:

*Behold, I will allure her and will lead her into the wilderness ,*

*and I will speak to her heart.* [Hos 2.14]

Note that in these three words, a three-fold status is denoted: of beginners, of proficients and of perfect. He allures the beginner when he enlightens him with grace, that he may grow and progress from virtue to virtue; then he leads him from the clamour and tumult of vices and thoughts into the desert of inner quiet; and there, being now perfect, he speaks to his heart. This comes about when he feels the sweetness of divine inspiration and is totally suspended in joy of mind. "O how great then is the magnitude of devotion, wonder and rejoicing in his heart! He is raised up above himself by the greatness of devotion, he is led above himself by the greatness of wonder, and he is beside himself in the greatness of joy."[2] *Follow me*, then.

He speaks after the fashion of a loving mother who, to teach her child to walk, shows it a piece of bread or an apple: "Come to me, and I will give it to you." When the child gets near enough, almost, to take it, the mother withdraws a little, and holds it out, and as she proffers it says: "Follow me, if you want to get it." Some birds, too, draw their chicks out of the nest, and by their own flight teach them to fly and follow them. So Christ, to get us to follow him, puts himself as an example and promises a reward in the Kingdom.

3. *Follow me*, then, because I know the good way, by which I will lead you. Proverbs 4 says of it:

*I will shew thee the way of wisdom; I will lead thee by the paths of equity,*

*which when thou shalt have entered, thy steps shall not be straitened;*

*and when thou runnest thou shalt not meet a stumbling-block*. [Prov 4.11-12]

The way of wisdom is the way of humility; every other is the way of foolishness, the way of pride. He showed us this way when he said: *Learn of me*, etc. [Mt 11.29]. A path is narrow, scarcely wide enough for one to pass another on their two feet; it is only half a road! The 'paths of equity' are poverty and obedience, by which the poor and obedient Christ leads you by his example. There is no twisting and turning, all is plain and direct; yet, wonder of wonders! Though it is so narrow, our footsteps are not constricted in them. The way of the world is wide and spacious, yet like drunkards, can never find their way along it. To a drunkard, wide is all the same as narrow! Ill-will makes narrow; poverty and obedience, precisely because they constrict, give liberty. Poverty makes us rich, obedience makes us free. He who runs after Jesus in these paths will not meet the stumbling-block of riches, or of self-will.

*Follow me*, then; and I will show you *what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man* [1Cor 4.9]. *Follow me*, and as Isaiah 45 and 60 says:

*I will give thee hidden treasures and the concealed riches of secret places*. [Is 45.3]

*Then thou shalt see and abound, and thy heart shall wonder and be enlarged*. [Is 60.5]

You will see God face to face, just as he is [cf. 1Cor 13.12; 1Jn 3.2]. You will abound with the delights and riches of the double robe of soul and body. Your heart will wonder at the choirs of angels and the mansions of the blessed, and so it will be enlarged from joy, in the voice of rejoicing and praise. *Follow me*, then.

[CHRIST'S LOVE FOR HIS FAITHFUL]

4. Christ's love for his faithful: *Peter turning*. He who follows Christ truly, desires that all should follow him; and so he turns to his neighbour with a solicitous mind, with devout prayer and with preaching of the word. The 'turning' of Peter signifies all this. And there is a **concordance** in the last chapter of the Apocalypse:

*The Bridegroom and the Bride* (that is, Christ and the Church) *say: "Come". And he that heareth, let him say: "Come"*. [Apoc 22.17]

Christ by inspiration, and the Church by preaching, say to a man, "Come". And he who hears them should say to his neighbour, "Come," that is, "Follow Jesus."

So, *Peter, turning about, saw that disciple whom Jesus loved, following* [Jn 21.20]. Jesus loves the one who follows him; whence he says in Numbers 14:

*My servant Caleb, …who hath followed me, I will bring into this land which he hath gone round, and his seed shall possess it*. [Num 14.24]

*He whom Jesus loved*; the Gloss says, "Though his name is not mentioned, John is in

this way distinguished from the others, not because he loved him alone, but because he loved him more than the rest." He loved the others too, but he was particularly close to him. "He gave him a more potent draught of his sweet love, for being a virgin when he was chosen by him, he remained a virgin; and so he entrusted his Mother to him."[3] He, too, was the one who reclined upon his breast at the Supper. It was a great indication of love, that he alone reclined upon the breast of Jesus, *in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* [Col 2.3]; in which was prefigured how great were the secrets of the divinity which he was to write of, more than the rest.

5. Note that Jacob reclined upon a stone, but John upon the breast of Jesus. The former was on a journey, the latter at supper. Jacob represents pilgrims, John the blessed. The former are on the way, the latter in their homeland. Genesis 28 says that when Jacob departed from Bersabee, he went on to Haran. When he wanted to rest, he laid his head upon a stone and slept. And in a dream he saw a ladder set up, and angels ascending and descending by it, and the Lord at the top of the ladder [cf. Gen 28.10-13]. Jacob, the just man still on his pilgrimage, beset by many a struggle, departs from Bersabee (meaning 'the seventh well', worldly desire that has no end, just as the seventh day is said to be endless) and goes on to Haran (meaning ''high place', that is, the heavenly Jerusalem). So he says with Habbakuk:

*I will go up to our people that are girded*, [Hab 3.16]

who have triumphed over the wicked world.

And because he desires to alleviate the labour of his pilgrimage, he lays his head on a stone and sleeps. The head is the mind, the stone is constancy of faith, the ladder set up is the two-fold charity, the angels are just men who go up to God by lifting up their minds, and go down to their neighbour in compassion of spirit. The just man who is a pilgrim, then, must rest by laying his mind upon constancy of faith. So Proverbs 30 says

*The rabbit, a weak people, which maketh its bed in the rock*. [Prov 30.26]

The rabbit is a timid animal, and represents the poor in spirit, who is weak against every injury, because he is timid; and so he makes the bed of his hope in the rock of faith, and there he rests and sleeps, and sees a ladder of charity set up in himself.

And note that the Lord is at the top of the ladder for two reasons: to hold it up and to welcome those who go up by it. He holds up the weight of our frailty, that we may be able to go up by works of charity. He welcomes those who go up, that with him, the Eternal and Blessed, we may be eternal and blessed. And then, in that supper of eternal satisfaction, we shall recline with John upon the breast of Jesus. His Heart is in his breast, love is in his Heart. We shall recline in his love, because we shall love him with all our heart and all our soul; and we shall find in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. O Love of Jesus! O treasure buried in love, wisdom of inexpressible savour, and knowledge that is recognition!

*I shall be satisfied when thy glory shall appear*. [Ps 16.15]

*This is eternal life: that they may know thee, the only true God,*

*and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent*. [Jn 17.3]

To him be praise and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

*6. A large eagle with great wings, long-limbed, full of feathers and of variety, came to Libanus and took away the marrow of the cedar*. [Ezek 17.3]

This is in Ezekiel 12. The eagle, noted for the keenness of its vision, is blessed John, who, being raised above himself in subtle insight of mind, saw and told us of the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, the Word who was in the beginning [cf. Jn 1.18,1]. *And we know that his testimony is true* [Jn 21.24].

So Ezekiel 1 says of him:

*There was the face of a man, and the face of a lion on the right side, and the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle over all the four*. [Ezek 1.10]

The right stands for prosperity, the left for adversity. Matthew and Mark, who are represented by the man and the lion, were on the right side; they wrote of the Incarnation of Christ and his preaching, in which was our prosperity. Luke is represented by the ox, which used to be offered in sacrifice; he began with the priesthood and led the Christ-to-be-sacrificed towards the temple and the altar of the Cross, wherein was the adversity of the Passion. John is represented in the eagle, which flies higher than other birds, as he penetrated hidden things more deeply than the rest, and so is said to be ‘over all the four’. Yet it is strange that he is said to be ‘over all the four’, since he himself is one of the four: he is, then, over himself! Truly, he is ‘above himself’, because he spoke what is beyond man, and so is called ‘a large eagle with great wings’.

The Reading of today’s Mass, Ecclesiasticus 15, explains what the ‘great wings’ of this eagle are:

*In the midst of the Church she has opened his mouth* [Ecclus 15.5]

This is what he himself says in Apocalypse 8:

*And I beheld, and heard the voice of one eagle flying through the midst of heaven* [Apoc 8.13],

A reference to the Church, in whose midst (that is, commonly, to everyone) *she opened his mouth*.

*And she filled him with the spirit of wisdom and understanding* [Ecclus 5.15]

These are the two great wings with which he flies even to the secrets of the Divinity, saying:

*In the beginning was the Word*, etc. [Jn 1.1]

7. He was, then, ‘long limbed’. The virtues are as it were the limbs of the soul, which are lengthened when they extend into works of charity. So what is said in the Reading of today’s Mass is **concordant** to this:

*He that feareth God will do good:*

*and he that possesseth justice shall lay hold on her.*

*And she will meet him as an honourable mother:*

*and will receive him as a wife married from virginity*. [Ecclus 15.1-2]

Blessed John, who feared God with a chaste and filial fear, therefore did good, extending himself to works of charity. You will find this in a clearer light if you read his Epistle, in which he wrote most effectively about charity, as one who possessed it. He, too, *began to do and to teach* [Ac 1.1]. He was a container of justice, because, as Ecclesiasticus 50 says, he was

*As a massy vessel of gold, adorned with every precious stone*. [Ecclus 50.10]

And because he contained within himself justice (that is, the truth of the Gospel), he laid hold on her, that is, on her fruit.

The Lord said in the Gospel that whoever left father, mother or wife would receive an hundred-fold, etc. [Mt 19.29]. Blessed John left mother and spouse for the Lord’s sake; and the Lord gave him no other mother but his own. So there is added: *And she will meet him as an honourable mother.* Blessed Mary, Mother of the Son of God, honoured with outstanding virtues and privileges of grace, came to meet John at the foot of the Cross. They stood, she on the right and he on the left; and there, like a wife from her virginity, received him, a virgin receiving a virgin. So it says in John 19:

*When Jesus therefore had seen his mother and the disciple standing, whom he loved, he saith to his mother: Woman, behold thy son. After that, he saith to the disciple:*

*Behold thy mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own;* [Jn 19.26-27]

That is, as his own mother or guardian. O bright pearl of blessed John's virginity, which merited to be received as a son by the Mother of God's Son, and to receive her as his own!

8. So there follows, regarding the purity of his virginity: *Full of feathers and variety*. Something similar is said in Job 29:

*I shall die in my nest, and as a palm tree shall multiply my days*. [Job 29.18]

A bird lines its nest with feathers, and makes it soft all round; and this for two reasons- so that the eggs should not be damaged by twigs, and so that the chicks, still without feathers, may find rest and warmth in the softness of feathers. Blessed John's 'nest' was his humble conscience. The word used, strictly, means 'little nest', not just 'nest'. Virginity is preserved by humility. The proud virgin is no virgin, but is defiled. Humility is expressed by the diminutive, 'little nest'. His 'little nest' was constructed with the softness of feathers, adorned with the gentleness of virginal purity. In this, the 'eggs' of thought are kept safe, and the 'chicks' of works will have warmth and rest.

So this eagle was 'full of feathers and variety', because from purity of mind he came to the beautiful variety of works. A beautiful variety, lilies mingled with roses. So of these two, the Reading of the Mass says:

*She hath clothed him with a robe of glory*, (as to purity of virginity)

*She hath heaped upon him a treasure of joy and gladness* [Ecclus 15.6]

(as to splendour of works). And even if he did not close his life in martyrdom, yet he was a martyr, having been cast into a cauldron of boiling oil, exiled to Patmos, and given poison to drink at Ephesus, yet by God's grace he came through unscathed, because *as a palm tree he multiplied his days*. The palm tree does not lose its greenness in cold or frost; in the same way blessed John did not lose his constancy of mind or his bodily virginity in either persecution or temptation. And so he died in his little nest, because he persevered in it even to death. Alternatively, I call the grave his 'little nest', in which today, having celebrated the divine mysteries, he as descended alive, and reclined himself as if he would sleep.[4]

9. There follows: *He came to Libanus and took away the marrow of the cedar.* Mount Libanus (meaning 'whiteness') is the heavenly homeland, *whose Nazirites are whiter than snow* [cf. Lam 4.7]. And in Apocalypse 3 it says:

*They shall walk with me in white, because they are worthy*. [Apoc 3.4]

The cedar, tallest of trees, is the height of the divinity. So, the eagle with great wings flew to that heavenly homeland and took the marrow of the cedar, when he said: *In the beginning was the Word*, etc. Alternatively, the cedar which does not decay is the humanity of Jesus, which did not see corruption and whose ‘marrow’ is the divinity. He took the marrow of the cedar and brought it to us, when he said: *The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*. The Reading of today’s Mass is **concordant** to this:

*She hath fed him with the bread of life and understanding,*

*and given him the water of wholesome wisdom to drink*. [Ecclus 15.3]

To be fed with the bread of life and given the water of wisdom to drink, is nothing other than to ‘take the marrow of the cedar’.

Let us, then, ask blessed John that by his prayers the Lord will grant us to despise earthly things and fly to heavenly ones, that we may be refreshed with the marrow of the cedar. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

10. *A large eagle*, etc. In this text there are three things to note, morally: the firm faith, the sure hope and the perfect charity of the penitent or just man.

Regarding the first: *A large eagle with great wings, long-limbed.* The eagle is noted for the sharpness of its sight and of its beak, which, when it grows blunt and cannot catch its food, it sharpens against the rock, and so is said to be renewed. So it says, *Thy youth shall be renewed like the eagle’s* [Ps 102.5]. Its sight is so keen that, when it is in the air, it can see little fishes in the depths of the water. In the same way the penitent, the Catholic, gazes on the hidden things of God with his heart’s eye, enlightened by faith (for as much as you believe, so much you will see); and he confesses it publicly with his mouth. So the Apostle says of this keenness of sight and beak:

*With the heart we believe unto justice; but, with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation* [Rom 10.10]

Truly this is a ‘large eagle’, (for the eye of faith is large and keen) which sees the Son of God descending from the bosom of the Father into the womb of the Virgin, lying in a manger, wrapped in cloths, offered in the temple with the sacrifices of the poor, fleeing into Egypt, a pilgrim in the world, seated on an ass, derided by the people, struck with a whip, besmeared with spittle, given gall and vinegar to drink, hanging naked on the Cross, buried in the tomb, leading captivity captive from Hell, rising from the grave, ascending into heaven, filling the Apostles with the Holy Spirit, and rendering to each according to his works in the Judgement. Behold the great eagle, keen in sight and beak! The Apostle says of it: *Our mouth is open to you, O ye Corinthians* [2Cor 6.11]. What he believed with a faithful heart, he preached with an open mouth, all its bluntness put away.

There follows: *with great wings*. There is a **concordance** to this in Apocalypse 12:

*And there were given to the woman two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the desert, unto her place*. [Apoc 12.14]

The ‘woman’ is the penitent soul, of whom Isaiah 54 says:

*The Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and mourning in spirit*. [Is 54.6]

Her two wings are contrition and confession, with which she flies into the desert of penitence, in which to find a place of peace and rest. And note that these two wings are called ‘great’. The wings of true contrition have four great pinions. The first is bitterness for past sin; the second is the firm intention of not falling again; the third is heart-felt forgiveness of every injury; the fourth is make amends to every man. In the wing of confession there are similarly four. The first is the humbling of mind and body before the priest; thus, *Mary sat at the Lord’s feet* [cf. Lk 10.39]; and, in Isaiah 47:

*Come down, sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon: sit on the ground*. [Is 47.1]

Come down in humility of mind, sit in the dust or on the ground in humbling of body. The second is the general and particular accusation of one’s own iniquity: *I will confess before thee* [Ps 31.5], he says, and again: *I am he that have sinned; I have done wickedly* [2Kg(Sm) 24.17]. The third is the laying bare of the circumstances (namely: "What, who, where, by whom, how many times, why, how, when"). The forth is the voluntary and devout acceptance of the penance enjoined by the priest, so as to say with Samuel: *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth* [1Kg(Sm) 3.9].

And so, regarding the satisfaction of penance, there is added: *Long limbed*. The hand which was before drawn back from alms-giving is now stretched right out. So Mark 3 says:

*There was in the synagogue a man who had a withered hand; to whom the Lord said: Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth, and his hand was restored*. [cf. Mk 3.1,5]

His knees were weak and as it were drawn up; his feet could not perform their function, because sloth had stolen it away, as it says in Proverbs 26:

*The slothful man saith: There is a lioness in the way, a lion in the roads.*

*As a door turneth upon its hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed*. [Prov 26.13-14]

But now he runs to prayer and bends his knees. See the great and long-limbed eagle!

11. There follows, regarding the second: *full of feathers and of variety.* There is something similar in Job 39:

*Will an eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest in high places?* [Job 39.27]

The penitent or religious is lifted up from earthly things on the aforesaid wings, at the Lord's command, who says: *Come ye after me*, etc. [Mt 4.19]; and again: *Let the dead bury their dead* [Mt 8.22]. He 'makes his nest' (that is, he sets his hope) in the 'high places' of the rewards of eternal life. He makes this nest with the feathers of patience and kindness. Job made his nest with these feathers, saying in Job 13:

*Although he should kill me, I will trust in him.* [Job 13.15]

"It is easy to bear suffering, if patience is not lacking."[5] *Full of feathers and variety*. When the variety of temptations or persecutions arise, the just man makes his nest with the feathers of patience, he covers himself and his chicks (his works), and so "In his patience he will possess his soul" [cf. Lk 21.19].

12. There follows, regarding the third: *came to Libanus and took away the marrow of the cedar.* The 'cedar', which puts serpents to flight with its scent, is charity, which drives away the serpents of envy, wrath, rancour and hatred from the heart of the just man. So the Apostle says in 1 Corinthians 13, [4-5] *Charity envieth not*, "because since it desires nothing in this present world, it does not know how to envy the success of another. *It dealeth not perversely*, because inasmuch as it expands in the sole love of God and neighbour, it overlooks all that departs from the right standard. *It thinketh no evil*, because basing its thinking on love of purity, it uproots every trace of hatred, and cannot concern itself with what defiles."[6] That is why it is said to be on Mount Libanus (which means 'whiteness'), to which the just man comes and takes the marrow of the cedar. The 'marrow' is the sweetness of contemplation or compassion for one's neighbour. When he is lifted up in love of God, he experiences his sweetness; when he stretches out in love of neighbour, he takes the marrow of compassion.

Let us, then, ask the Lord Jesus Christ to give us the wings of contrition and confession, to fly away from sin and make the nest of our hope in heavenly things, and to consume the marrow of two-fold charity. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] Cf. Abbot GAUFREDUS, *Declamationes*, 2-3; PL 184.438

[2] cf. RICHARD OF ST VICTOR, *Beniamin maior*, 5,5; PL 196.174

[3] cf. ROMAN BREVIARY, 5th Responsory at Matins for the Feast of St John; also the 3rd Responsory

[4] This legend, like those mentioned previously, is referred to in ISIDORE, *De ortu et obitu Patrum*, 72,128-9; PL 83.151-2; and in PETER COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, in Evangelia*, 196; PL 198.1642

[5] OVID, *The Cure for Love*, 521

[6] GREGORY, *Moralia* X,6,10; PL 75.925-6

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## THE FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE HOLY INNOCENTS

1. At that time: *The angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, saying: Arise*, etc. [Mt 2.13]

Two things are noted in this Gospel: the Lord's flight into Egypt, and the slaying of the children.

[THE LORD'S FLIGHT INTO EGYPT]

2. The Lord's flight into Egypt: *The angel of the Lord*.

In this first clause, there is shown morally how anyone of good will should carefully guard his work from the snares of the devil and the favour of the world. Let us see what is meant by the angel, Joseph, his sleep, the mother, the boy, Egypt and Herod.

The 'angel of the Lord' is the inspiration of divine grace, which tells a man what he should do and what he should not do. So Exodus 14:

*The angel of the Lord went before the camp of Israel;* [Ex 14.19];

And Exodus 32:

*My angel shall go before thee,* [Ex 32.34]

For two purposes, namely to show you the way and to defend you against the enemy. So Tobit 5 says:

*May you have a good journey; and may God be with you in your way; and may the angel of the Lord accompany you*. [Tob 5.21]

Joseph (meaning 'growing') is any Christian who, planted in the Church by the faith of Christ, should grow from good to better, and bear the fruits of eternal life. His 'sleep' is peace of mind and the sweetness of contemplation. "Sleep is the rest of an animal's

strength, with an intensification of its natural powers."[1] When carnal concerns are at rest, and the spiritual are extended, then Joseph is ‘asleep’. So Job 3 says:

*Now I should have been asleep and still; and should have rest in my sleep:*

*with kings and consuls of the earth, who build themselves solitudes;*

*or with princes, that possess gold, and fill their houses with silver*. [Job 13-15]

3. ‘Kings’ are *those who hunger and thirst for justice* [Mt 5.6]. Augustine[2] says, "Enter the court-room of your soul. Let reason be the judge, conscience the prosecutor, fear and pain the torturer and executioner, and let your works be in the witness-box." The ‘consuls of the earth’ are *those who mourn* [Mt 5.5] their misery and guilt. What sound counsel it is, to weep for oneself! Jeremiah 7 gives advice and counsel:

*Cut off thy hair and cast it away: and take up a lamentation on high*. [Jer 7.29]

Your ‘hair’ is temporal concerns, which hinder you from seeing your wretchedness and weeping for your sins. Cut it from your body, then, and cast it from your mind, and then you will be able to *take up a lamentation on high*. To lament in this way is not to spare oneself. Self-love is apt to be soft on itself, and lament insincerely. Those who want to act rightly should ‘build themselves solitudes’ not just of mind, but of body too. St Jerome[3] says, "To me, a fortress is a prison, but the desert is a paradise." ‘Princes’ are *the poor in spirit* [Mt 5.3], who possess ‘gold’ (that is, golden poverty), and fill their ‘houses’ (their consciences) with the sounding silver of confession- both of divine praise and their own sin.

Sleeping with all these, Joseph should be still from the noisy world, and rest in sleep from tumultuous thoughts, so that the angel of the Lord may appear to him and say, *Arise*, that is, mount up, that you may grow high; don’t be like a turnip, that grows in and under the earth; be like a palm-tree which mounts on high. Arise, then, mount up like the swallows, which do not feed on the ground, but catch and eat their food in the air. The Apostle says:

*Seek the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth*. [Col 3.1-2]

Rise, then, and *take the child and his mother* [Mt 2.13].

4. The ‘mother’ is good will, which when divinely inspired conceives good works affectively, and brings them to birth effectively. For instance: if you have good-will, but have not yet proposed any good deed in your heart, your will is barren, and is cursed as ‘barren in Israel’ [cf. Ex 23.26; Dt 7.14]. But when you deliberate some good, you conceive; and when you complete it in work, you give birth. So Isaiah 8 says:

*I went to the prophetess; and she conceived and bore a son. And the Lord said to me: Call his name, Hasten to take away the spoils, make haste to take away the prey*. [Is 8.3]

The 'prophetess' is the soul, or a man's own will, which should prophesy to him the glory of the Kingdom, the pains of hell, the malice of the devil, the deceit of the world, and his own wretchedness. Go to her in devotion, and she will conceive by deliberation and give birth by execution. And note that your 'son', your work, has a name in three parts: 'Hasten', because "Delay brings danger, and once you are ready it harms you to put off action."[4] *That which thou dost, do quickly* [Jn 13.27]. Note that every good work should be performed in three ways: swiftly, charitably, and to an end. Hasten, then, so as to act swiftly; 'take the spoils' from yourself, so as to provide charitably for your neighbour; and 'make haste to take away the prey' of the Kingdom of heaven, which should be the final cause of your whole work. Take, then, the child and his mother, *lest Esau kill the mother with the children* [cf. Gen 32.11], lest Pharao drown the child in the river, or Herod cut its throat with the sword.

5. So there follows:

*For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the child to destroy him* [Mt 2.13].

Herod means 'glorying in skins'; he is the devil or the world. *The devil transformeth himself into an angel of light* [2Cor 11.14]; he glories in the whiteness of another's skin, while his own hide is of the darkest hue. The world, too, is *like to whited sepulchres, which are full of all filthiness* [cf. Mt 23.27], and its glory is an outward one, in the brightness of the skin. It does everything so as *to be seen by men* [cf. Mt 6.5]; and John 5 says:

*How can you believe, who receive glory from one another; and the glory which is from God alone, you do not seek?* [Jn 5.44]

These two conspire together to destroy the child, the purity of our work; the former by fraud, the latter by favour, the former by suggestion, the latter by flattery. They are the 'hairy ones' of whom Isaiah 34 speaks: *The hairy ones shall cry out to one another,* [Is 34.14]

*to seek the child to destroy him*.

So in the Psalm five things are mentioned, arising from these two, which customarily destroy the child; but first a saving remedy is mentioned:

*His truth shall compass the with a shield* [Ps 90.5]

The Truth of the Father is the Son, and his shield is the Cross, whereby he surrounds you to protect you against the devil, the world and the flesh. In the Cross is humility

against the devil's pride; there is found Christ's poverty, against the avarice of the world; there is crucifixion with nails against the lust of the flesh. Therefore,

*Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror of the night;* (the devil's suggestions)

*of the arrow that flieth in the day;* (vainglory;

of which Jeremiah says: *I have not desired the day of men, thou knowest;* [Jer 17.16]

and Luke: *And that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace!* [Lk 19.42])

*of the business that walketh about in the dark;* (the deceits of hypocrisy)

*of invasion;* (of adversity*, )*

*or of the noon-day devil* [Ps 90.5-6] (of prosperity, which burns like the sun at noon.)

6. Therefore, lest he perish, *Take the child and his mother and fly into Egypt* [Mt 2.13], which means 'darkness' or 'anguish', denoting the state of penitence. Note that the glory of the skin consists in two things: in whiteness and in extension; and on the contrary the glory of penitence is in darkness and contraction. In darkness of clothing, since, as Apocalypse 6 says:

*The sun became black as sack-cloth of hair.* [Apoc 6.12]

In the contraction of humility and in anguish of sorrow in the mind, as Isaiah 21 says:

*Anguish hath taken hold of me, as the anguish of a woman in labour,* [Is 21.3]

That is, of the penitent who brings forth the spirit of salvation. Do you want to save the child? Then *fly into* this *Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee* [Mt 2.13]. Note that the child Jesus, as the Gloss says, was hidden for seven years in Egypt; and you should dwell all the seventy years of your life in the Egypt of penitence, so that when they are done you may hear: *Return into the land of Israel* [Mt 2.20], the heavenly Jerusalem in which you will *see God face to face* [cf. 1Cor 13.12]

[THE SLAYING OF THE CHILDREN]

7. The slaying of the children: *Then Herod, seeing*, etc. [Mt 2.16]

The Gloss says: "It is likely that Herod raged against the children a year and four days after the birth of Christ; because he had journeyed to Rome, either to answer accusations or to consult the Romans about the things that were said of the Christ; or he

waited for such a long time after enquiring about the child, that he might be more sure of catching him, and that he should in no way escape."

*From two years old and under* [Mt 2.16]. The reference to two years implies that he killed all, from the day-old child to the one two years old. Let us see what is meant by the Magi and the deceiving of Herod, by Bethlehem and the killing of the little ones, by the two years, by Rama and by Rachel.

The Magi, who worshipped Christ and offered gifts, are penitents who, enlightened by the star of grace, *worship in spirit and in truth* [cf. Jn 4.23], and offer the three-fold gift of penitence. The devil is deceived by them, because they resolve to return to him no more, but return to their heavenly homeland by another way, the way of humility. Job 40 says:

*Behemoth trusteth that the Jordan may run into his mouth,* [Job 40.18]

but adds:

*Behold, his hope shall fail him* [Job 40.28]

The Jordan means ‘humble descent’, and it stands for penitents who go down from the throne of the world to contempt of self. The devil still trusts to swallow them up, and bring them back to himself; but he hopes in vain for their return, because the angel’s warning (the grace of the Holy Spirit) strengthens them not to go back to him.

Alternatively, Herod is the world, whom they deceive when the leave with him all their possessions. We often deceive a dog that is chasing us, by leaving him our cloak. In this way, Joseph deceived the harlot, when she caught hold of him, saying:

*Lie with me. But he leaving the garment in her hand fled, and went out.* [Gen 39.12]

Seeing herself despised, she said:

*See, he hath brought in a Hebrew, to abuse us* [Gen 39.14]

The harlot is the world; if she tries to hold you in sin, leave her your garment (temporal goods) and run away free.

8. There follows: *He was exceeding angry:* when the devil is deceived he rises in wrath; *and sending killed all the men children that were in Bethlehem and in all the borders thereof* [Mt 2.16]. Just as a wolf gladly gobbles up children, so the devil gladly defiles the purity of continence. He envies almost no good thing as much as chastity, and for this reason: in Baptism his power was broken, sins were forgiven, grace was bestowed and the door of life was opened. All that he strives to ruin, as he tries to defile the robe of innocence, in either sex, by the lust of the flesh. But, what is more to be lamented and

bewailed, it is in Bethlehem (‘the house of bread’) that he slays the children. ‘Bethlehem’ is religious life, in which is refreshment for the soul, and its children are slain when religious are corrupted by incontinence of the flesh. And not just in religious life, but ‘in all the borders thereof’, that is, in those who, however much they seem to follow their footsteps and live according to their teaching, yet the purity of chastity perishes. And this is so ‘from two years old and under’, by which number is denoted the corruption of a double purity, namely of soul and of body.

Alternatively: Herod is wrath, Bethlehem is the soul, the children are the simple affections of reason, the borders are the bodily senses, and the two years the effects of a two-fold charity. "Anger hinders the mind, so that it cannot discern what is true."[5] When one’s mental state is disturbed, one’s reason is ruined; so that Job 5 says:

*Anger indeed killeth the foolish; and envy slayeth the little one* [Job 5.2]

And this is not just an inward effect, but even outward- the eye is darkened, the tongue threatens, the hand is ready to strike, and so charity is lost. Thus:

*The anger of man worketh not the justice of God* [Jas 1.20] (or even of one’s neighbour).

And so, for all these evils, *a voice of lamentation and great mourning* (that is, contrition of heart and confession of voice) should be *heard in Rama* (‘on high’, or ‘before God’): *Rachel bewailing her children*, etc. [cf. Mt 2.18]. The Church weeps, and will not be comforted here, because her children are not of this world.

Rachel (meaning ‘sheep, or ‘seeing God’) is the penitent soul which, like a sheep in its simplicity, sees God in contemplation. She bewails her children (that is, her works) because they are no more (that is, not as living, full and perfect as they were previously, before she committed mortal sin), and so she will not be comforted. So Isaiah 22 says:

*Depart from me, I will weep bitterly. Labour not to comfort me, for the devastation of the daughter of my people*. [Is 22.4]

*My soul refused to be comforted* [cf. Ps 76.3], he says, because I hope to be comforted *when thy glory shall appear* [Ps 16.15]. May he grant us this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

9. *Thy children as olive shoots, round about thy table* [Ps 127.3].

There is something similar in Luke 11: *My children are with me in bed* [Lk 11.7]; and the last but one chapter of Deuteronomy says,

*Let Aser be blessed in children,* [Dt 33.24]

Aser meaning ‘delight’, and standing for Christ who is the delight of all the blessed. E is blessed and praised in the Holy Innocents, who were killed today by Herod, for his sake and in his place. A child was sought, and children were killed; and in them the pattern of martyrdom began, dedicating the infancy of the Church. So, in Isaiah 49, the Church says:

*Who hath begotten these?*

*I was barren and brought not forth, led away and captive:*

*and who hath brought up these?*

*I was destitute and alone: and these, where were they?* [Is 49.21]

Thus, *Thy children as olive shoots, round about thy table.*

Note that that the ‘shoot’ stands for the tenderness of the new-born, while the ‘olive’ (from which oil is pressed) stands for the shedding of blood. O cruel Herod! First let the olive mature, that you may squeeze out more oil! You shed milk rather than blood, for it is the shoot you are uprooting, a tender offspring you are slaying! What grief! What piety! The little child laughs at the murderer’s sword, the infant jests! Little lambs are taken to market, hung up by their feet, as it were, to be killed for Christ’s sake. The olive shoots are carried to the press, to squeeze out the oil. This is the Passion of the little ones.

10. And what is their merit? It is: *Round about thy table* [Ps 127.3], where *they sing a new song* [cf. Apoc 14.3]. Apocalypse 14 says:

*And no man could sing the song, but those hundred forty-four thousand who were purchased from the earth. These are they who were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were purchased from among men, the first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth there was found no lie; for they are without spot before the throne of God*. [Apoc 14.3-5]

Note that in this text five wonders of the Holy Innocents are referred to:

first, the grace of virginity (*for they are virgins*);

second, the glory of eternity (*they follow the Lamb*);

third, the offering of young blood ( *the first fruits to God*, the Father*, and to the Lamb*, the Son);

fourth, the innocence of childhood (*in their mouth there was found no lie*);

and fifthly, the contemplation of he divine majesty ( *they are before the throne of God*).

Note that we have mentioned three things: the throne, the table and the bed. These three stand for on and the same thing, eternal life. Before the throne are those who praise and look on the face of God, as in Isaiah 52:

*The voice of thy watchmen.*

*They have lifted up their voice, and shall praise thee together:*

*for they shall see eye to eye*. [Is 52.8]

They sit at table, eating and drinking, as in Luke 22:

*I dispose to you, as my Father hath disposed to me, a kingdom; that you may eat and drink at my table, in the kingdom* of heaven. [Lk 22.29-30]

This table is said to be ‘round’, for eternal satisfaction has no beginning or end. Finally, those who rest sleep in bed; as in Isaiah 26:

*Go, my people, enter into thy chambers, shut thy doors upon thee;* [Is 26.20]

and in the last chapter:

*There shall be month after month, and sabbath after sabbath,* [Is 66.23]

That is, perfection of glory after perfection of life, and eternal rest after the rest of the heart. May he who is blessed for ever grant us this, by the prayers of the Holy Innocents. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

11. *Thy children*, O loving Jesus, are those Christians whom you bore in the anguish of your Passion. As the final chapter of Isaiah says:

*Shall not I that make others to bring forth children, myself bring forth? Says the Lord.*

*Shall I, that give generation to others, be barren? Saith the Lord thy God*. [Is 66.9]

Who is it that has given us birth in the pain of the Passion? The Wisdom of the Father is

that *woman,* who*, when she is in labour, hath sorrow* [Jn 16.21]. He says,

*My soul is sorrowful even unto death* [Mt 26.38]

By his grace, he makes others give birth to the spirit of salvation.

Note that the Latin '*filius*' resembles the Greek '*phileo*', 'I love'. Hosea says, *I will love them freely* [Hos 14.5]. Love binds two people together. Our love so bound him to us that it drew him to our misery, as if he could not live in heaven without us. He was like an eagle flying to its prey; as in Job 39:

*Wheresoever the carcass shall be, she is immediately there* [Job 39.30]

A 'carcass' is a fallen body, lacking life. It is human nature, fallen from grace and lifeless. O wonderful love! O mysterious compassion! That a seraph should fly down from above to a decaying corpse, take on a human body, bear the gibbet of the Cross and shed his own blood, to revive his dead son! That is why he compares himself in the Psalm to a pelican, saying:

*I am become like to a pelican of the wilderness*. [Ps 101.7]

12. Note the pelican is a little bird that delights in solitude. It is said to kill its offspring with blows, to mourn for them, and after three days to wound itself so that they may revive from the shedding of its blood. That is how Christ, made small in his humility, solitary in his prayer (because, as the Evangelist says, *He passed the whole night in prayer* [cf. Lk 6.12], and *He was in desert places* [cf. Lk 1.80]) killed his offspring Adam and Eve as though with bows, when he said: *Cursed is the earth in thy work* [Gen 3.17]; and, *Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return* [Gen 3.19]. But afterwards he mourned for them, saying in the Psalm:

*As one mourning and sorrowful, so was I humbled*. [Ps 34.14]

Even so, in II Kings 18, it is told that David *went up into his chamber and wept, saying: My son Absalom, Absalom my son! Who will give me that I might die for thee?* [cf. 2Kg (Sm) 18.33]. In the same way Christ, grieving for the death of the human race, went up into the chamber of the Cross and wept there (for as the Apostle says to the Hebrews, *He offered up with a strong cry and tears* [cf. Heb 5.7]) as though to say, *My son* Adam, Adam *my son! Who will give me that I might die for you?*: that is, that my death might profit you?

After three days (namely three ages, of nature, of the written law, and of grace) he wounded himself- that is, he let himself be wounded- and sprinkled his dead children with his blood, and made them to revive. And all this proceeded from the exceeding love with which he loved us; as John says:

*Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end*; [Jn 13.1]

that is, to death.

*Thy children*, then. Truly they are yours, because they are redeemed by your blood; and would that they were dedicated to you, not to their own (that is, their flesh): *his own received him* not [Jn 1.11], it says. That they be yours, they should be 'like olive shoots'.

13. Note that the olive is bitter in its root, strong in its wood, and virtually incorruptible, green in its leaves and sweet in its fruit. Just so, every Christian should be bittern in contrition, constant in intention, faithful in word and sweet in works of mercy- for 'olive oil' represents works of mercy.

And attend carefully that 'olive shoots' are referred to, for the sons of Christ *should walk in newness of spirit* [cf. Rom 6.4], and by confession *renew their spirit day by day* [cf. 2Cor 4.16], which is *corrupted according to the desire of error* [cf. Eph 4.22]. *Be renewed in the spirit of your mind* [Eph 4.23], he says. Jeremiah 4 says:

*Thus says the Lord to the men of Juda and Jerusalem* (the clergy and the laity):

*Break up your fallow ground, and sow not upon thorns*. [Jer 4.3]

The fallow field is cleft open, and it stands for the human heart, which must be cleft open by the plough of contrition and cleansed of weeds by the hoe of confession, and this is to 'break up one's fallow ground'. He sows upon thorns, who in this mortal life does some good things, from the range of god things. Let your children, then, be like olive shoots.

14. And where do they dwell? Where should their life be led? Surely, *around thy table*. Note that the table is three-fold, and each has its proper refreshment. The first is of teaching, of which it is said:

*Thou hast prepared a table before me, against them that afflict me*, [Ps 22.5]

namely heretics. The second is of penitence, of which Job 36 says:

*The rest of thy table shall be full of fatness* [Job 36.16]

Happy is that penitence which has rest of conscience and is full of 'fatness' (fraternal charity). The third is that of the Eucharist, of which the Apostle says:

*You cannot be partakers of the table of the Lord and of the table of devils.* [cf. 1Cor 10.21]

In the first table is refreshment, namely the word of life; in the second is groaning and weeping; in the third, the body and blood of Christ.

And note that it does not say ‘at the table’, but ‘round the table’. All Christians should be ‘around’ these three tables, like one who goes round carefully what he wants to see but is unable to penetrate. In this way they should go ‘round’ the table of teaching, so as to be taught how to judge between good and evil, and between good and good. They should go round the table of penitence, so as to bewail what they have done and left undone, to confess sin and its least circumstances, to make amends to the injured, restore what has been taken, and give the needy of their own goods. They should go round the table of the Eucharist, so as to believe firmly, approach devoutly, reckon themselves unworthy of so great a grace, and receive carefully.

Let us ask the Son of God so to refresh us at this three-fold table, that we may be found fit to be satisfied with the Holy Innocents at the heavenly table. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever and ever.

NOTES

[1] ARISTOTLE, *De somno et vigilia*, 3

[2] AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* 351,4,7; PL 39.1512

[3] JEROME, *Letter to the monk Rusticus*, 125,8; PL 22.1076

[4] LUCAN, *The Civil War* I,281

[5] CATO, *Disticha*, II,4,2

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## THE FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE LORD

1. At that time: *After eight days were completed*, etc. [Lk 2.21]

In this Gospel two things are noted: Christ's circumcision, and the calling of his name.

[CHRIST'S CIRCUMCISION]

2. Christ's circumcision: *After eight days were completed, that the child should be circumcised.* Note that in this first clause we are taught, anagogically, how every just person will be circumcised from all corruption in the general resurrection. But "because you have heard a circumcised word about the circumcised Word, let us speak in a circumcised way about his circumcision."[1]

"Christ was circumcised in the body alone, because he had nothing in the mind that might be circumcised. For, *he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth* [1Pt 2.22]. But neither did he contract sin, for, as Isaiah says: *He ascended upon a light cloud* [Is 19.1], that is, he assumed flesh free from sin."[2] "Coming into *his own*, because *his own would not receive him* [cf. Jn 1.11] he had to be circumcised, lest the Jews should take occasion against him and say, 'You are uncircumcised, you should perish from your people, because as Genesis says,

*The male, whose flesh of his foreskin shall not be circumcised, shall be destroyed out of his people*. [Gen 17.14]

You are a transgressor of the Law, we will not hear you against the Law.'"[3]

He was circumcised, then, for at least three reasons: to fulfil the law- "The mystery of circumcision had to be observed until the sacrament of Baptism should be substituted;"[4] to take away any occasion for the Jews to calumniate him; and "to teach us the circumcision of the heart. Of this, Romans says:

*The circumcision of the heart is in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God*. [Rom 2.29]"[5]

3. *After eight days were completed*. Let us see what these three mean, the eighth day, the child and his circumcision. Our life revolves in seven days, after which comes the eighth day of the resurrection. Ecclesiastes 11 says of this:

*Give a portion to seven, and also to eight:*

*for thou knowest not what evil shall be on the earth*. [Eccles 11.2]

That is as if to say, Give the seven days of your life a share of good works, for which you will receive a reward in the eighth day of the resurrection. In that day there will be such great evil upon earth (that is, on earthly folk who love the earth), that it not known to any man.

Then *the floor will be cleansed and the wheat separated from the straw* [cf. Mt 3.12; Lk 3.17], and *the sheep will be separated from the goats* [cf. Mt 25.32]. The sweeping of the floor is the giving of the final Judgement; the wheat means the just who are to be stored in the heavenly barn. So Job 5 says:

*Thou shalt enter into the grave in abundance,*

*as a heap of wheat is brought in its season*. [Job 5.26]

The grave is eternal life, in which the just are hidden from the troubling of the demons, as a person is hidden in the grave from the sight of men, when they enter it in the abundance of their good works. The straw, meaning the proud who are light and unstable, will be burned with fire, as Job 21 says:

*They shall be as chaff before the face of the wind,*

*and as ashes which the whirlwind scattereth*. [Job 21.18]

The lambs or sheep, that is, the humble and innocent, will be set at Christ's right hand, as Isaiah 40 says:

*He shall feed his flock like a shepherd.*

*He shall gather the lambs with his arm and shall take them up in his bosom;*

*and he himself shall carry them that are with young*. [Is 40.11]

4. Note that in these four words, 'feed', 'gather', 'take up' and 'carry', we may discern the four gifts of the body (clarity, immortality, agility and subtlety) which the just will have in the eighth day of the resurrection. He will 'feed' by clarity; as in Ecclesiastes 11:

*The light is sweet: and it is delightful for the eyes to see the sun*. [Eccles 11.7]

Regarding this he says:

*The just shall shine out like the sun in the kingdom of God* [cf. Mt 13.43]

If the eye which is still corruptible is so delighted by the deceitful brightness of the wretched body, how great do you think that delight will be in the true splendour of the glorified body? He will 'gather' by immortality, for death scatters and immortality gathers together. He will 'take up' by agility; what is agile is easily lifted. He will 'carry' by subtlety; that which is subtle is easily carried.

The goats, however, (that is, the lustful) will be hung by the heels on the pikes of hell. The Lord curses the 'fat cows' [cf. Am 4.1], the proud and lustful prelates of the Church, in Amos 4:

*The days shall come upon you, when they* (the demons*) shall lift you up on pikes and what shall remain of you in boiling pots. And you shall go out at the breaches one over against the other: and you shall be cast forth into Hermon,* [Am 4.2-3; Vulgate has '*Armon*'],

meaning 'anathema', because being anathematized and cursed by the Church Triumphant, they will go into eternal punishment.

All this, namely glory and punishment, will be given to each in the eighth day of the resurrection, according to what each has done in the seven days of this life. Genesis 29 says of this:

*Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed but a few days, because of the greatness of his love*. [Gen 29.20]

She was *well favoured, and of a beautiful countenance* [Gen 29.17]. A little later, it says that:

*After the week was past, he married Rachel.* [Gen 29.28]

He refers to the same in chapter 31:

*Day and night was I parched with heat, and with frost;*

*and sleep departed from my eyes.* [Gen 31.40]

O love of beauty! O beauty of love! O glory of the resurrection, how much you enable

man to bear, so as to attain to you nuptials! The just man serves the whole septenary of his life in lowliness of body and humility of mind. He is parched in the day, when prosperity burns with the heat of vainglory; and in the night, when adversity assails with the frost of diabolical temptation. Thus, all sleep and rest flee away, for there are ‘combats within, fears without’ [cf. 2Cor 7.5]. He fears the world, he fights against himself; and yet amid such evils the days seem few, so great is his love. "Nothing is hard for a lover."[6] O Jacob, I pray you, be patient, bear all humbly, for when the week of this present misery is past, you will attain the long-desired wedding of the glorious resurrection, in which you will be circumcised from all toil and slavery to corruption.

5. So it is said: *After eight days were completed, that the child should be circumcised.*

It says ‘the child’, not ‘an old man’. Who this child is, see in the Sermon for the Nativity.[7] In that resurrection, every elect soul shall be circumcised, for, as Isidore[8] says, "He will rise to glory without any vice, or any deformity." All weakness, slowness, corruption and need will be far away, and anything else that does not befit that kingdom of the Highest King, wherein ‘the children of the resurrection and of the promise shall be equal to the angels of God’ [cf. Lk 20.36]. Then there will be true immortality. "The first state of man was the possibility of not dying; because of sin, his punishment was the impossibility of not dying. The third state, in bliss, will be the impossibility of dying."[9] "Then free will shall be full. It was given to the first man to be able not to sin; but how much more blessed it will be, to be unable to sin!"[10] O desirable eighth day, which circumcises all evil from the child!

[THE NAMING OF CHRIST]

6. His naming: *His name was called Jesus* [Lk 2.21]. Name of sweetness, name of delight, name comforting the sinner and full of hope! "Joyful in the heart, melodious in the ear, like honey in the mouth."[11] Of this joyful name, the Bride says in the Canticles:

*Thy name is as oil poured out*. [Cant 1.2]

Note that oil has five properties: it floats on other liquids, it softens what is hard, it smoothes what is rough, it illuminates what is dark, it satisfies the body. In the same way the name of Jesus is above every other name of men or angels, for *in the name of Jesus every race bows the knee* [cf. Phil 2.10]. If you preach it, you soften hard hearts; if you call upon it, it smoothes rough temptations; if you think on it, it enlightens the heart; if you commission it, it satisfies the mind.

And take note that this name Jesus is not only called ‘oil’, but ‘poured out’. Whence? And whither? From the Father’s heart into heaven, earth and hell. In heaven, to give joy to the angels, so that they cry out in exultation in the Apocalypse:

*Salvation to our God, who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb*, [Apoc 7.10]

That is, to Jesus. In earth, for the comforting of sinners, of which Isaiah says:

*Thy name and thy remembrance are the desire of the soul;*

*my soul shall desire thee in the night*. [Is 26.8-9]

In hell, to free the captives, so that they are said to have cried on bended knee, "You have come, our Redeemer, etc."[12]

7. Concerning this name, let me briefly quote what Innocent[13] has written: "This name 'Jesus' has two syllables and five letters, three vowels and two consonants.[14] Two syllables, because Jesus has two natures, divine and human. The divine comes from the Father, of whom he is born without a mother; the human comes from his mother, of whom he was born without a father. See, then, two syllables in one name, because there are two natures in this one Person. Note, further, that a vowel is that which can be sounded by itself, while a consonant must be sounded with some other. The three vowels stand for the divinity, which being one in itself, sounds in the three Persons. For,

*There are three who give testimony in heaven: the Father, the Word , and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one*. [1Jn 5.7]

The two consonants stand for the humanity, which, having two substances (flesh and soul), does not sound by itself, but rather with another, to which it is joined in unity of Person. 'For since the rational soul and the flesh make one human nature, so God and man make one Christ.'[15] A 'person' is called thus, being a rational substance sounding *per se*, and this is Christ. "And he is both God and man, but in himself he speaks inasmuch as he is God, not as man, because the deity retains the right of personality in assuming human nature, but the humanity did not receive the right of the personality in being assumed. For person does not assume person, nor nature assume nature, but person assumes nature."[16]

"This name, then, is holy and glorious, *and it is invoked upon us* [Jer 14.9]; nor, as Peter says, is there *any other name under heaven, whereby we must be saved* [cf. Ac 4.12]. By this name may he himself save us, who is God, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is blessed above all, for ever and ever. Amen."[17]

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

8. *Sephora took a very sharp stone, and circumcised the foreskin of her son*, [Ex 4.25]

as Exodus 4 says.

There is something similar in Genesis 21:

*Abraham called the name of his son, whom Sara bore him, Isaac; and he circumcised him the eighth day, as God had commanded him*. [Gen 21.3-4]

It was not his mother, nor Joseph his foster-father, but ‘Abraham’, that is, the eternal Father, who gave him the name of salvation. Where there is salvation, there is laughter; for Isaac means ‘laughter’, and Jesus (whose name means ‘salvation’ or ‘saviour’) is our laughter.

Note that there is a certain plant which is called ‘salvation’, because it eases the aching of the head or the stomach. The aching of the head represents pride of mind; and it is told in IV Kings 4 that the sun beat upon the head of the child, and

*He said to his father: My head acheth, my head acheth*. [4(2)Kg 4.19]

Again, in Judith 8:

*Manasses died in the time of the barley harvest; for he was standing over them that bound sheaves in the field, and the heat came upon his head*. [Jdth 8.2-3]

Manasses (meaning ‘forgetful’) represents the friend of the world who is forgetful of eternity and goes out to reap the barley. Barley, the food of cattle, represents temporal things. When the brute man seeks to gather them and bind them in sheaves by storing them in his treasury, the heat of vainglory comes upon his head, from which arises the elation of pride, and so the death of the soul. Again, the aching of the stomach is the seething of wrath; whence Isaiah 57 says:

*The wicked are like the raging sea which cannot rest:*

*And the waves thereof cast up dirt and mire*. [Is 57.20]

When a man burns with anger he is like a raging sea, because there is bitterness in his heart, disturbance in his reason, blindness in his mind and rancour against his brother. That is why he is called ‘impious’, a man without piety. He strikes some, he curses others.

But our salvation, Jesus, cures these illnesses, saying *Blessed are the poor in spirit* [Mt 5.3] against the first, and *Blessed are the meek* [Mt 5.4] against the second, and so on. Glory be to the Father, then, who sent us salvation; and praise be to the Virgin who bore him and circumcised him today.

Let it be said, then: *Sephora took*. Her name means ‘looking upon him’, and she is the blessed Virgin, who gazed upon him face to face as he lay in the manger, wrapped in swaddling cloths and crying in that humble stable, he *on whom the angels desire to look* [cf. 1Pt 1.12].

9. *Sephora took a very sharp stone. "*The Jews assert that the custom of circumcising with stone knives is derived from this text, or else from Josue at Gilgal. Nevertheless, where we have the word ‘stone’, the Hebrew has ‘blade’, and ‘a very sharp blade’ means ‘a razor’; and so the Jews circumcise with razors."[18] Whether the Lord’s circumcision was with a stone or a metal knife, whether it was performed by blessed Mary or by Joseph, or by relatives of either of them, is not very important and we need waste no time investigating it. What we know for certain is that he was circumcised today; the words that are added, *she circumcised the foreskin of her son,* should be taken as meaning either that she herself circumcised, or arranged for him to be circumcised by someone else, according to the Lord’s command.

And note that Christ’s whole life was in blood. He began with blood on the eighth day, and he ended in blood. This was most necessary for us, because, as the Apostle says,

*All things are cleansed in blood; and without shedding of blood there is no remission*. [Heb 9.22]

It is to be noted, then, that Christ shed his blood five times. The first was today, at the circumcision; the second in his sweat, the third in his scourging, the fourth in his crucifixion, the fifth when his side was pierced by the spear. The sun appears red at its rising and at its setting, and so Christ was blood-red at the beginning and at the end of his life. Blessed is he, for ever and ever. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON}

10. *Sephora took a very sharp stone.* There is something similar in Josue 5:

*The Lord said to Josue: Make thee knives of stone, and circumcise the second time the children of Israel. He did what the Lord had commanded*. [Jos 5.2-3]

The Lord said:

*This day I have taken away from you the reproach of Egypt*. [Jos 5.9]

Sephora means ‘his bird’, or ‘looking at him’ or ‘pleasing’ or ‘adhering’. Sephora is the faithful soul, which if it were a bird would be looking; and if looking would be pleasing; and if pleasing would be adhering. Each one follows from the rest. She is a ‘bird’ by the abandonment of things, ‘looking’ by contemplation of heavenly things, ‘pleasing’ by love and ‘adhering’ by union. When she is lifted up, she looks, when she looks she is set on fire with love, when she is on fire she is united. Let us treat each of these.

The two wings of a bird are faith and love in the soul, which lift her from earthly things. Faith and hope are concerned with what cannot be seen, and so they raise one up from

visible to invisible realities. Those who have only a verbal faith, who put their hope in themselves and their possessions, and trust in man- these gape at earthly things and have a taste for earthly things. So Job says that man (who savours the soil and lives in the water of greed and lust) *is born to labour,* like a beast of burden. The peasant puts blinkers on his donkey's eyes, and beats it with a stick, and so it drags the weighty millstone in a circle. The peasant is the devil, and his ass in the worldly man. He closes his eyes, blinding his reason and understanding, and beats him with the stick of cupidity, so that he may drag the millstone of worldly vanity behind him.

*The wicked walk round about: O my God, make them like a wheel*. [Ps 11.9; Ps 82.14]

But *the bird is born to fly* [Job 5.7]. Natural History says that the narrower the breast of a bird, the more easily it flies. If it were wide, it would displace more air and move sluggishly. The Lord says in Job 39:

*Will the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest in high places?*

*She abideth among the rocks, and dwelleth among cragged flints,*

*and stony hills where there is no access.*

*From thence she looketh for the prey, and her eyes behold afar off*. [Job 39.27-29]

The eagle is that happy soul which restrains its breast from the breadth of temporal things, so that it may be lifted up from earthly things and be able to make the nest of her conversation among the crags. As the Apostle says:

*Our conversation is in the heavens.* [Phil 3.20]

And note that "He says 'the heavens', not 'heaven'. There are three heavens. The first is subtlety of understanding, the second is clarity of justice, the third is sublimity of glory. In the first there is the contemplation of the truth; in the second, the love of equity; in the third, the fulness of eternal joy. In the first, ignorance is enlightened; in the second, concupiscence is extinguished; in the third, misery is swallowed up. If the light of truth surrounds you, you reach the first heaven. If the flame of love sets you on fire, you dwell in the second. If you savour some taste of interior sweetness, you are admitted to the third."[19] This taste is union, whereby the Bride is united to the Bridegroom:

*He who is joined to God is one spirit* [cf. 1Cor 6.17]

These three heavens can be assigned to the 'rocks', the 'flints' and the 'stony hills'. In the 'rocks', because of their stability, there is the contemplation of truth. In the 'flints' there is the love of equity, because from flint we strike fire, which represents the love of the Creator. In the 'stony hills', which long abide, there is the fulness of eternal joy.

Alternatively, these three represent those angelic virtues which abide in perpetual love of the Creator, which may be called cragged flints and inaccessible hills. When the others fell, they remained immobile, and the apostates can neither climb them nor approach them. From them, Sephora the winged bird, the contemplative soul, gazes upon God, her food and her refreshment.

11. Let us say, then: *Sephora took a very sharp stone, and circumcised the foreskin of her son.*

Let us see what is meant by the very sharp stone, the son, his foreskin and circumcision. The stone is penitence, of which Job 29 says:

*Who will grant me that I might be according to the months past…*

*when I washed my feet with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil?* [Job 29.2,6]

The ‘month’ is perfection, the ‘butter’ is the sweetness of grace, the ‘rivers of oil’ are the shedding of tears. Job, then, meaning ‘grieving’, is the penitent who sighs for his first conversion and perfection of behaviour. Then was sweetness of grace in his mind, to wash his feet (his affections) from all filthiness. Then the rock, harsh penance, poured forth floods of tears. And note that just as oil floats on other liquids, so tears cover every good work. A work without devotion is like a lamp without oil. This stone is sharp in contrition, sharper still in confession, but sharpest of all in works of satisfaction, with which Sephora must circumcise the foreskin of her son.

The son is the body, and its foreskin is temporal superfluity, which does not let a man consider his wretchedness. It is reckoned shameful to display. Hence the ‘aprons’, of which Genesis 3 says:

*When Adam and Eve perceived themselves to be naked, they sewed together fig-leaves, and made themselves aprons*, [Gen 3.7]

or loincloths, like short breeches. Exiled from heaven, the children of Adam, who are stripped of God’s grace, gladly cover themselves with fig-leaves. Note that fig-leaves cause itching, and they shrink and dry up in the heat of the sun; likewise temporal things cause the itch of lust, and in the heat of death leave those they have covered naked. Happy that soul who circumcises the foreskin of her son! Here is the stony knife with which the sons of Israel (Christians) are circumcised a second time, who first were circumcised in Baptism from all sin. But, because malice increased and wickedness abounded, they are circumcised again by Jesus Christ with the stony knife of harsh penance. And so ‘the reproach of Egypt’ (mortal sin) which they had contracted from the darkness of the world, is taken away.

12. Alternatively, *The rock was Christ* [cf. 1Cor 10.4]. Whence the Psalm says that *the rock is a refuge for the rabbits*. [Ps 103.18], sinners who are beset by sin. And again,

*Blessed be he that shall take* (i.e. restrain) *thy little ones* (movements) *against the rock* (Christ). [Ps 136.9]. When a wave of the sea breaks against a rock, is itself broken. In the same way, if the tempest of your temptation beaks against Christ, it is broken by the very power of his strength, and you will escape safely.

This stone is sharp in the scourge of our present misery, and so Genesis says:

*Cursed is the earth in thy work; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to thee.* [Gen 3.17,18]

It is sharper in the incineration of the flesh, whence:

*Ash thou art, and into ash thou shalt return.* [cf. Gen 3.19]

It will be sharpest of all in the pronouncement of the irrevocable sentence:

*Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire,* etc. [Mt 25.41]

With the sharpness of this fear, the soul not merely cuts but circumcises the foreskin of her son, not only by making evil to be taken away, and by showing works of mercy to others; but even by removing sweet things from her own mouth, curiosities from her eyes, flatteries from her ears, soft things from her hands, and delights from her whole body.

May Jesus himself, then, who was circumcised this day for us, so circumcise us from all vices that in the eighth day of the resurrection we may be found fit to rejoice in the double robe. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] Cf. INNOCENT III, *Sermon* 4, *On the circumcision of the Lord*; PL 217.465

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid

[6] CICERO, *Oratio* X,33

[7] See above, Festival Sermon on the Nativity, 11-14

[8] ISIDORE, *Sententiae* I,26,1-2; PL 83.594

[9] cf. P.LOMBARD, *Sententiae*, II, *dist* 19,4

[10] cf. Ibid. *dist* 25,3

[11] cf. BERNARD, *In Cantica sermo* 15,6; PL 183.847

[12] ROMAN BREVIARY, *Office of the Dead*, Resp. 3 at Mattins

[13] INNOCENT III, Sermons on the Saints 4, on the Circumcision of the Lord; PL 217.466-7

[14] In Latin, J is a vowel, the same as I.

[15] Athanasian Creed

[16] INNOCENT III, *loc. cit*.

[17] INNOCENT III, *loc. cit*.; PL 217.470

[18] P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, liber Exodi*, 10; PL 198.1147

[19] RICHARD OF ST VICTOR, *Mystical notes on the Psalms*, Ps 121; PL 196.365-6

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

1. *When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Juda*, etc. [Mt 2.1]

In this Gospel three things are noted: the appearance of the star, the troubling of Herod, and the offering of the three Magi.

[THE APPEARANCE OF THE STAR]

2. The appearance of the star: *When Jesus was born*. In this first clause there is noted morally how a person is converted from worldly vanity to a new state of life. But first we will briefly deal with the history.

"Jesus was born on a Sunday night, for on the very day that he said: *Be light made; and light was made* [Gen 1.3], *The Orient from on high hath visited us* [Lk 1.78]."[1] "It is told that Octavian Augustus saw in the sky a virgin, carrying a son and showing him to the Sybil; and from then on he forbade anyone to call him 'Lord', because the *King of kings and Lord of lords* [Apoc 19.16] was born. And so the poet[2] says,

'A new progeny is sent down from heaven above.'

A very great spring of oil flowed all day from the inn, without cost; for there was born on earth the one who was *anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows* [cf. Ps 44.8]. The temple of Peace shook to its very foundations. The Romans, for the sake of the perfect peace which was to come upon the whole world under Caesar Augustus, had wonderfully constructed the temple of Peace. When they made enquiry as to how long it would endure, they received the answer, 'Until a virgin gives birth.' Rejoicing, they understood this to mean 'for ever', because a virgin would never give birth. But *God has destroyed the wisdom of the wise and has rejected the prudence of the prudent* [cf. 1Cor 1.19]; because at the very hour of the Lord's birth, the foundations crumbled."[3]

"On the thirteenth day after his birth, that is, today, *Behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying: Where is he that is born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star* [Mt 2.1-2]. They were called 'Magi', from the greatness of their knowledge. Those whom the Greeks call 'philosophers', the Persians call 'Magi'. They came from the

region of the Persians and Chaldeans. It may be that in thirteen days they were able to cross a vast distance on their dromedaries. The star was perceived by the rest in its splendour, in one place and in motion. In a splendour which the light of day could not impair. In a place, because it was not in the firmament with the lesser stars, nor in the aether with the planets, but it held its way in the air close to the earth. And in motion, because at first it stood still over Judea and gave the Magi the sign to come to Judea; and of their own deliberation they came to Jerusalem as the capital of Judea. When they left that place, at first it went before them with perceptible motion, and when it had performed its function it soon ceased to be, returning to the pre-existing matter from which it had been taken."[4]

Note that "This day is called Epiphany, from '*epi*' ('above') and '*phané*' (giving light'), because today Christ was manifested by the sign of the star. It is called 'Theophany', from '*theos*' ('God'), because being manifested today, after thirty years he was baptized by the word of the Father in the river Jordan. It is also called 'Bethphany', from '*beth*' ('house'), because one year after his Baptism he performed a divine miracle in a house, at the wedding."[5]

3. *When Jesus was born*, etc. Let us see what the moral significance of these four is: the star, the Magi, the east and Jerusalem.

The star is the illumination of divine grace, or the knowledge of the truth. So it stands for Jesus, from whom all grace comes, who says in the last chapter of the Apocalypse:

*I am the root and stock of David, the bright and morning star*. [Apoc 22.16]

Jesus Christ, though he is the son, is also the 'root' (that is, the father) of David; or else, just as a root carries the tree, so the mercy of Christ carried David, a sinner and a penitent. He is a 'bright star' in enlightening the mind, the 'morning star' in the knowledge of the truth.

The Magi are the worldly wise of which Isaiah 19 speaks:

*The wise counsellors of Pharao have given foolish counsel.* [Is 19.11].

Pharao (meaning 'uncovering a man') is the world, which covers by its vanity but uncovers in the misery of death. It gives nothing but convenient counsel, which it repeats in the greater need, and leaves us naked and wretched. Foolish, then, is the counsel of those wise men who advise people to gather what is not theirs, and which they cannot take with them; and to burden themselves with what they cannot carry through the narrow gateway. The gate of death is so narrow that the soul itself can barely pass through, naked and alone. When we come to the passage, we must put away all earthly weight; yet because 'sins have no substance', they easily pass through with the soul.

The 'east' is worldly vanity or prosperity. So Ezekiel 8 says:

*I saw, and behold, men having their backs towards the temple of the Lord and their faces towards the east: and they adored toward the rising of the sun*. [Ezek 8.7,16]

The temple is Christ's humanity, or the life of any just man. Those who turn their backs on the Lord's temple, and their faces towards the east, are those who forget the Passion and death of Christ, and direct all their knowledge and taste towards the vanity of the world. So Jeremiah 2 complains:

*They have turned their back to me, and not their face:*

*and in the time of their affliction* (death) *they will say: Arise, and deliver us.*

*Where are the gods* (pleasures and riches)*, whom thou hast made thee?*

*Let them arise and deliver thee in the time of thy affliction*. [Jer 2.27-28]

Alternatively, those who turn their backs to the temple and adore towards the rising of the sun, are those who despise the poverty, humility and affliction of the just, and reckon happy those who abound in pleasures and riches.

Jerusalem ('peaceful') is newness of life, that is, penitence. So Isaiah 32 says:

*My people shall sit in the beauty of peace, and in the tabernacles of confidence, and in wealthy rest*. [Is 32.18]

Happy state, wherein is the beauty of a peaceful conscience, the confidence of holy conversation, and the wealth of fraternal charity! Just as the star drew the Magi from the east to Jerusalem, so divine grace draws sinners from the vanity of the world to penitence, to seek the new-born king, and seeking to find him, and finding him to adore him. They say, *Where is he who is born king of the Jews?* [Mt 2.2]; that is, of those who confess, of penitents? They seek the King of penitents, born in them, who bids them do penance. They say, *We have seen his star in the east* (that is, we have come to know his grace amid the vanity of the world), and so by him *we have come to worship him*.

[THE TROUBLING OF HEROD]

4. The troubling of Herod: *King Herod hearing this was troubled* [Mt 2.3]

The devil, king of a troubled crowd, is troubled. The world, too, is troubled when it hears that Christ is already born in penitents, and sees other sinners converted by grace to him. He grieves that his kingdom is depleted, and every day the kingdom of Christ is enlarged. So Exodus 1 says:

*Pharao said to his people: Behold, the people of the children of Israel are numerous and stronger than we. Come, let us wisely oppress them, lest they multiply*. [Ex 1.9-10]

The craftiness of the devil oppresses the children of God by temptation, and the malice of the world does so with blasphemy and injury. So there follows:

*The Egyptians hated the children of Israel, and afflicted them, and mocked them; and they made their life bitter*. [Ex 1.13-14]

The life of sinners is a smoothing of the just. *Moab is the pot of my hope* [Ps 59.10]; for Moab means ‘from the father’, and represents those who are of their father the devil, and the wicked live for the just, that is, for their benefit.

Herod (meaning ‘glory of the skin) was troubled over the poor little new-born king; who says: *I receive not glory from men* [Jn 5.41]; and: *I seek not my own glory* [Jn 8.50]. He says:

*My kingdom is not of this world* [Jn 18.36]

The glory of the skin is troubled, because it sees its beauty turned to ugliness, its softness to roughness. So Isaiah 3 says:

*Instead of a sweet smell there shall be a stench;*

*and instead of a girdle, a cord;*

*and instead of curled hair, baldness;*

*and instead of a stomacher, haircloth*. [Is 3.24]

This needs no explanation: it is literally true in penitents. And in Exodus 33:

*Now presently lay aside thy ornaments, that I may know what to do to thee*. [Ex 33.5]

So Esther 14 says:

*Queen Esther, fearing the danger that was at hand, had recourse to the Lord. And when she had laid away her royal apparel, she put on garments suitable for weeping and mourning. Instead of divers precious ointments, she covered her head with ashes and dung; and she humbled her body with fasts. And all the places in which before she was accustomed to rejoice, she filled with her torn hair*. [Esth 14.1-2]

Esther (meaning ‘hidden’) is the penitent soul which hides from the tumult of the world in

solitude of spirit and even of body. She has recourse to the Lord, because there is no refuge save in him from the danger of judgement, and it seems so present and ever-threatening that she is afraid. She puts off her robes of glory and puts on the garb of penitence; and instead of the ointments of all kinds of pleasure, she fills her head (her mind) with the ashes of her frailty and the dung of her own wickedness. She fasts conscientiously, *and all the places*, etc. This is what Gregory[6] says about the Magdalene: "As many pleasures as she found within herself, so many did she make a sacrifice of."

[THE OFFERING OF THE THREE MAGI]

5. The offering of the three Magi: *And behold, the star which they had seen in the east* [Mt 2.9].

O mercy of God, which never forgets to show pity! It is always at hand, to one who comes to himself. So Isaiah 58 says:

*Then thou shalt call, and the Lord shall hear; thou shalt cry, and he shall say: Here I am* [Is 58.9];

*because I the Lord thy God am a merciful God* [Dt 4.31]

*And behold the star*. When they turned aside to Herod, they lost sight of the star. This refers to backsliders who return to the devil or to mortal sin, and lose grace; but when they depart from him, they recover what they had lost. So Jeremiah 3 says:

*It is commonly said: If a man put away his wife, and she go from him and marry another man, shall he return to her any more? Shall not that woman be polluted and defiled? But thou hast prostituted thyself to many lovers* (demons and sins). *Nevertheless return to me, saith the Lord*. [Jer 3.1]

*And behold, the star went before them* [Mt 2.9]. This is **concordant** to Exodus 13:

*The Lord went before them to shew the way by day in a pillar of cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire; that he might be the guide of their journey at both times*. [Ex 13.21]

"The pillar of cloud in the day protected against the heat of the sun, and the pillar of fire by night protected against darkness and the attacks of serpents."[7] Note that the illumination of divine grace is called a 'pillar', because it supports; it is 'of cloud' because it cools the heat of the sun, worldly prosperity; it is 'of fire' against the cold of infidelity, the darkness of adversity, and the poison of the devil's temptation.

*Until it came and stood over where the child was* [Mt 2.9]. This is the completion of toil, journey's end, joy of the seeker and reward of the finder. Therefore, *Let the heart of*

*them that seek rejoice*, [Ps 104.3] that seek you, O Jesus; and if of them that seek, how much more of them that find? The star went before, the cloud went before; the former showing the way to the Saviour's stable, the latter to the land of promise. And the land of promise was in the stable, flowing with the honey of divinity and the milk of humanity! Run, then, after the star; hasten after the pillar, because they lead you to life. You will toil for a while, but you will soon arrive and find the desire of the saints, the joy of the angels.

6. *And seeing the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy* [Mt 2.10].

Note that in these three words a triple joy is indicated, which anyone who recovers grace that has been lost should have. He should rejoice that he has not died in mortal sin, and been damned eternally. He should rejoice because he has been restored to grace, which he has not merited; and because he will be brought to glory, if he perseveres. Of this triple joy Isaiah 61 says:

*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, and my soul shall be joyful in my God*. [Is 61.10]

*And entering into the house* [Mt 2.11]. It says in Luke 15 that *the elder son was angry and would not go into the house* [cf. Lk 15.25,28]. The prodigal son, however, 'returning to himself' [cf. Lk 15.17], was already inside. The Apostles were told: *Salute no man by the way* [Lk 10.4]. He who is 'by the way' is outside; and he who is outside is out of the house and not worthy of greeting. Indeed, as Amos 5 says:

*In every street there shall be wailing; and in all the places that are without they shall say: Alas, alas!* [Am 5.16]

*They found the child with Mary his mother, and, falling down, they adored him* [Mt 2.11].

Because they enter, they find; and because they find, they fall down and worship. In the child and Mary we see innocence and purity; in their falling down, self-contempt; in their adoration, the devotion of faith. Penitents should enter, then, the house of their own conscience, and find innocence towards their neighbours and purity as to themselves. And they should not be proud because of this, but fall on their faces and adore, devoutly and faithfully, him who gave these gifts

*And entering into the house* (the inn which Luke refers to*) they found the child with Mary,* etc. The Gloss says, "Why was not Joseph found with Mary by the Magi? Lest any occasion of evil suspicion should be given to the Gentiles, who had sent their first-fruits without delay to the new-born Saviour, to worship him."

*And opening their treasures* [Mt 2.11]. The Gloss says, "We do not open our treasures on the way, until we offer from the secrets of our hearts the sacrifices of the past to God alone. Ezechias, who showed his treasures to strangers, was afterwards condemned." "He who carries his treasure openly in the way, is asking to be robbed."

7. *They offered him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh* [Mt 2.11].

Gold pertains to tribute, incense to sacrifice, myrrh to the burial of the dead. Or else, these three imply in Christ royal power, divine majesty and human mortality. Alternatively, gold (which is bright, solid, and makes no noise when it is struck) denotes poverty, which is not dulled by the soot of avarice, nor blown away by the wind of temporal things. It is solidly based; when it is offended, it does not retaliate or grumble.

Again, in Arabia (meaning 'sacred') there is a grove in which incense and myrrh are found. Those who control this grove are (in Arabic) called 'sacred'. When they harvest or cut this grove, they do not take part in funerals or defile themselves with sexual intercourse. The incense tree is immense and many-branched, very smooth skinned, and secreting a sweet-scented sap like almond. Its name is connected with 'striking', or with 'God' who is honoured with it. It may be adulterated with a mixture of gum and resin, but its properties can be distinguished; for incense burns when fire is applied to it, while resin smokes and gum liquefies.

The incense tree stands for prayerful devotion. It is immense in contemplation, many branched in fraternal charity (praying both for friends and enemies), and soft skinned in outward kindness. It secretes the sweet-scented sap of tears, pleasing in the sight of God. So Canticles 4 says:

*Arise, O north wind* (that is, depart, O devil),

*and come, O south wind* (O Holy Spirit);

*blow through my garden* (my mind),

*and let the aromatical spices thereof flow* (that is, tears). [Cant 4.16]

This sap is the refreshment of sinners, as the milk of almonds is refreshment for the sick. He who prays beats his breast, and his devotion goes up to God. But alas! Today prayerful devotion is adulterated and corrupted by being mixed with the resin of vainglory in hypocrites, and with the gum of money in those wretched clergy who offer prayers and Masses for monetary reward. True devotion burns with the fire of divine love, but when corrupted with vanity it smokes, and dissolves in cupidity.

Again, the myrrh tree rises to a height of five cubits. Its sap is even more precious, and flows freely; that which is obtained by cutting the bark is reckoned inferior. Myrrh, which is bitter, is the bitter affliction of the heart or body. Its first cubit is the remembrance of death Its second is the presence of the angry judge in the judgement. Its third is his irrevocable sentence. Its fourth is the unquenchable Gehenna. Its fifth is the company of all wicked men and the unavoidable and close punishment by the demons, a tenacious penalty. What flows freely from this tree is more precious and more acceptable to God; what is drawn out by the wound of sickness or adversity is less valuable.

8. The Magi, then*, offered him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh*.

So true penitents offer him the gold of pure poverty, the incense of devout prayer, and the myrrh of voluntary affliction. And note that the incense of devout prayer and the myrrh of saving penance are found nowhere but in Arabia, that is, holy Church. Whoever wants to keep them and gather their fruit must keep clear of the corpse of unjust reward, which the miser seeks as a crow seeks a corpse, and from lustful intercourse.

Let us then ask the Lord that we may offer him these three things, so as to reign with him who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

9. *At that time shall a present be brought to the Lord of hosts,*

*from a people rent and torn in pieces:*

*from a terrible people, after which there hath been no other:*

*from a nation expecting, and trodden under foot,*

*whose rivers have spoiled their land*. [Is 18.7]

This prophecy in Isaiah 18 refers to the conversion of the Gentiles, whose first-fruits (the Magi) today brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus Christ, the Lord of the angelic hosts. Malachi 1 says:

*From the rising of the sun even to the going down, my name is great among the Gentiles: and in every place there is sacrifice and there is offered to my name a clean oblation, saith the Lord of hosts*. [Mal 1.11]

But in order that we may better understand the misery of the Gentiles and the mercy of God the deliverer, we will briefly comment on each word.

The Gentile race (of which we are children) was torn away from God by the worship of idols; and so Hosea 4 says of the idolatrous Jews who followed Jeroboam:

*Ephraim is a partaker with idols: let him alone,* (for) *their banquet is separated*. [Hos 4.17f]

Jeroboam (‘division of the people’), according to III Kings 12,

*made two golden calves, and said to them: Go ye up no more to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt*. [3(1)Kg 12.28]

It was also torn in pieces by the hostility of the devil, as we may read in the 'Passions' of several Apostles, because "the devil took from those who worshipped him sight, hearing and mobility; and inflicted various sufferings on them."[8] So Mark 9 says:

*And crying out and greatly tearing him, he went out of him;* [Mk 9.25]

And elsewhere:

*They that were troubled with unclean spirits were cured.* [Lk 6.18]

It was terrible in its ferocity; so that Habbakuk 1 says:

*Behold, I will raise up the Chaldeans, a bitter and swift nation, marching upon the breadth of the earth, to possess the dwelling-places that are not their own*. [Hab 1.6]

The three Magi came from the region of the Persians and Chaldeans to worship the Lord. After them there was no people so terrible, as the text of Habbakuk continues:

*They are dreadful and terrible:*

*their horses are lighter than leopards and swifter than evening wolves*. [Hab 1.7,8]

There follows: *from a nation expecting*. They were expecting the fulfilment of Balaam's prophecy in Numbers 14:

*A star shall rise out of Jacob,*

*and a sceptre* (or 'a man') *shall spring up from Israel*. [Num 24.17]

*Trodden under foot*, by various wars. Just as they trod others underfoot, so they were trodden under foot by others; the Chaldeans destroyed Jerusalem, and were destroyed in turn by Cyrus and Darius. And they were swallowed up not only by strangers, but even by themselves. So there follows: *whose rivers have spoiled their land*, a reference to civil war and bloodshed.

Let us therefore give thanks to Jesus Christ, who has deigned to receive this day a gift from such a faithless and barbarous people, and to gather his Church from them, which is ourselves. To him be honour and glory through endless ages. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

10. *At that time,* etc. Note that seven kinds of mortal sin are referred to in this text; some are now converted to penitence by the grace of God, who were once entangled in them. The ‘people who are rent’ is pride; ‘torn in pieces’ refers to avarice; ‘terrible’ is wrath; the ‘people expecting’ is vainglory; ‘trodden under foot’ is envy; the ‘two rivers’ are gluttony and lust. Let us deal with each.

The ‘people who are rent’ are the people of the proud. As the wind uproots a tree, so pride separates man from God; so that Job 19 says:

*He hath taken away my hope, as from a tree that is plucked up*. [Job 19.10]

Man’s hope is God; he is cut off from it when he is torn away from the root of humility by the wind of pride. No wonder, for pride is seeking to go above one’s proper station, while humility seeks lowliness. The proud man climbs, but God comes down. What could be more contrary or opposite? The former seeks the heights, the latter the depths. He is torn away from him, and cannot please him or cling to him unless he is humble. The root is the life of the tree; humility is the life of man. If someone has a beautiful and fruitful tree in his garden, and finds it uprooted by the wind, is he not grieved? Of course he is! How much more is it to be lamented, when our soul is torn by the wind of pride from her Creator, who hates pride above all things, who ‘resists the proud’ [cf. 1Pt 5.5] and who ‘has put down the mighty’ [cf. Lk 1.52]. Pride has a fall; he who is down is safer that he who is up; and so, as Seneca[9] says, "Betake yourself to little things; you cannot fall from them."

11. The ‘people torn in pieces’ is the people of the avaricious and usurers. Just as birds and beasts tear a corpse to pieces, so the demons tear the hearts of misers and usurers with avarice. So Nahum 3 says:

*Woe to thee, O city of blood, all full of lies and violence:*

*rapine shall not depart from thee*. [Nah 3.1]

‘The life of the soul is in the blood’ [cf. Dt 12.23], and the life-blood of the poor is what he owns. Take away a man’s blood, or a poor man’s property, and each will die. So robbers and usurers who take away what belongs to others are called ‘a city of blood’. Natural History says that elephants are very cold blooded, and poisonous serpents greatly desire to drink their blood; and so, when it is very hot, they attack them to draw off their blood. In the same way misers and usurers, who are infected by the poison of avarice, thirst for what belongs to other people. The blood of the poor is cold, and so is their property. Poverty and nakedness do not let them keep warm. Under the burning heat of need, they attack them and apply themselves so as to suck their blood.

So: *Woe to thee, O city of blood, all full of lies and violence*, etc. There is lying in the tongue, violence in the heart, and rapine in the hand. It says in the last chapter of the

second book of Maccabees that Judas *commanded that the tongue of the wicked Nicanor should be cut out and given to the birds* [cf. 2Mac 15.33]. Nicanor (meaning 'a standing lamp') is the usurer who wants to stand and give light, but who quickly falls and is put out. So Job 21 says:

*How often shall the lamp of the wicked be put out?* [Job 21.17]

And chapter 18:

*Shall not the light of the wicked be extinguished,*

*and the flame of his fire not shine?*

*The light shall be dark in his tabernacle:*

*And the lamp that is over him shall be put out.* [Job 18.5-6]

A lamp has two things, light and heat. So the miser has the light of human favour and the heat of temporal wealth. When he is extinguished in death, he is deprived of both. Because his tongue was divided in many lies, it will be cut up and given to the demons; or else, he will be punished in many ways for sins of the tongue. His heart will be torn, because "what he gained with toil and kept with fear, he loses with grief."[10] The devil keeps tight hold of a usurer: his hand by means of robbery, so that he should not give alms; his heart by means of gaining by violence, so that he should not think of good; his tongue by lying, so that he should not offer prayer or anything else good.

12. The 'terrible people' are the wrathful and angry. So Job 16 says of the devil or of the angry man:

*He hath gathered together his fury against me;*

*and threatening he hath gnashed with his teeth upon me.*

*My enemy hath beheld me with terrible eyes*. [Job 16.10]

See how terrible it is, when a man burns with anger: his forehead frowns, his countenance is pale, his nostrils flare, his eyes are grim, his lips livid, his teeth grind, his hands flail about. Such a man seems nothing less than a terrible monster! So there is added: *after which there hath been no other man* so cruel and bestial. In Daniel 4, it says of Nabuchodonosor:

*Let his heart be changed from man's and let a beast's heart be given him*. [Dan 4.13]

"Do not understand this as a bodily change; Nabuchodonosor suffered an alienation of the mind. He lost the power of speech, and seemed to himself like an ox in his fore-parts, and a lion in his hind-quarters."[11] The man who burns with anger is alienated in mind and loses the power of right speech. First he shakes his horns like an ox, in threats and blasphemies; then he tears like a lion with his hands and feet.

13. The ‘people expecting’ are hypocrites and vainglorious. For every work they do, they expect the reward of praise, like hirelings. It says in John 10 that

*The hireling seeth the wolf coming and leaveth the sheep and flieth.* [Jn 10.12]

The wolf is the devil’s temptation, and the sheep are good thoughts. He who works, not for love of justice, but for the reward of vainglory, easily gives way to temptation and, if he had any good intentions, he abandons them. The Psalm says of this ‘expecting’,

*All the beasts of the field shall drink; the wild asses shall expect in their thirst*. [Ps 103.11]

Note that there are two kinds of wild ass. One lives in Spain and has no horns; the other lives in Greece and has horns. There are two kinds of hypocrite. Some hypocrites seem to have no horns, because when injured they appear meek, when in trouble they are quiet, and they refuse to accept honours. But in all this they act craftily, because in fleeing glory they are really seeking glory. Other hypocrites have horns; at the first verbal injury they put up the horns of pride, and show outwardly what they are like inwardly. The wild ass or ‘onager’ is named from ‘*ager*’, ‘field’. *The field is the world* [Mt 13.38]. Hypocrites of either kind are ‘asses of the world’, which they serve in expectation of the reward of praise or money; and they do this ‘in their thirst’, with which they burn and so are restless until they drink something. But ‘the beasts’, simple people, shall *drink with joy out of the Saviour’s fountains* [Is 12.3]. He has two fountains, grace and glory. They drink of the first in reality, and of the second in hope, and will in the future drink of it in its beauty.

14. The ‘people trodden under foot’ are the envious, who are tortured and trodden down by other people’s happiness. "You will not find the torture of the Sicilian tyrant to be worse than envy."[12] So I Kings 18 says:

*Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was exceeding angry, and this word was displeasing in his eyes, and he aid: They have given David ten thousands, and to me they have given but a thousand. What can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul did not look on David with a good eye from that day and forward*. [1Kg(Sm) 18.7-9]

See how he was tortured, how he was trodden underfoot!

15. The ‘rivers’ are gluttony and lust, Chobar and Tigris, the two rivers of Babylon [cf. Ezek 1.1-3; Dan 10.4]. Chobar means ‘heaviness’, and this is gluttony, of which Luke 21

says:

*And take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeitings and drunkenness and the cares of this life; and that day come upon you suddenly*. [Lk 21.34]

The tiger is a beast with distinctive markings, wonderful in strength and speed, and the Tigris is named after it. This is lust. It is striped with the markings of various pleasures; it is strong in suggestion and swift to pass into action. Blessed Bernard[13] says, "It torments regarding the future, without satisfying in the present, or giving pleasure for what is past." These two rivers have spoiled the land (the mind) of the man who has them, because little by little they swallow him up.

We have heard about the misery of all these things; let us consider also the mercy of God, who frees us from such miseries. Behold, at this time of divine kindness and mercy, the gift of penitence is brought by the aforesaid sinners to Jesus Christ, the Lord of hosts, that is, of the heavenly powers. You too, beloved, should bring your gifts with the three Magi: the gold of contrition, the incense of confession and the myrrh of satisfaction, so that you may receive the gift of glory from Jesus Christ himself in heaven. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, in Evangelia*, 5; PL 198.1540

[2] VERGIL, *Eclogue* IV,7

[3] INNOCENT III, *Sermon 2, on the Lord's Nativity*; PL 217.457

[4] P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, in Evangelia*, 6; PL 198.1541-2

[5] cf. INNOCENT III, *Sermon 7, on the Epiphany*; PL 217.485

[6] GREGORY, *Homilies on the Gospels*, 33,2; PL 76.1240

[7] P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, liber Exodi*, 30; PL 198.1157

[8] This is reminiscent of several passages in the *ACTA SANCTORUM*.

[9] SENECA, *Epistola* 20

[10] cf. BERNARD, *De conversione ad clericos*, 8,14; PL 182.842

[11] P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, liber Danielis* 4; PL 198.1452

[12] cf. HORACE, *Epistola* I,2,58-59

[13] Untraced.

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL

1. At that time, Simon Peter said to Jesus: *Behold, we have left all things and followed thee* [Mt 19.27]. In this Gospel two things are noted: the Apostolic eminence in the Judgement, and the reward of those who relinquish transitory things.

[THE APOSTOLIC EMINENCE IN THE JUDGEMENT]

2. The Apostolic eminence: *Behold, we have left all things.*

Peter, *a swift runner pursuing his course* [Jer 2.23], says: *Behold, we have left all things* "You did right, Peter; you could not follow a running man if you were burdened."[1] Superior to Paul, he had heard the Lord say:

*Amen I say to you that a rich man shall hardly enter the kingdom of heaven*. [Mt 19.23]

So, to enter easily, he left all things.

What 'all things'? We must leave outward and inward things, possessions and the desire to possess, so that nothing remains to us. The Lord says in Isaiah 14:

*I will destroy the name of Babylon, and the remains, and the bud, and the offspring*. [Is 14.22]

The 'name of Babylon' is the name of ownership- 'mine', 'yours'. Christ destroyed in his Apostles not only this 'name', but the 'remains' of ownership. And not only this, but the 'bud' (the temptation to have things) and the 'offspring' (the desire to possess). Happy are those religious in whom these things are destroyed, and who can truly say: *Behold, we have left all things.*

See the Apostles flying! Isaiah 60 says:

*Who are these that fly as clouds, and as doves to their windows?* [Is 60.8]

Clouds are light; the Apostles, light because they have put away the burden of the world, fly after Jesus. Job 37 says:

*Knowest thou the great paths of the clouds, and the perfect knowledges?* [Job 37.16]

The ‘great paths’ are the leaving of all things. They are narrow in our pilgrimage, but great in reward. ‘Perfect knowledge’ is to love Jesus and to go after him. These were the ways and the knowledge of the Apostles, who flew like doves to their windows. The ‘windows’ are openings to the outside. The Apostles, and apostolic men, are simple and innocent as doves; and so they fly from earthly things, and keep guard over the windows of their senses, so as not to go out through them to the things they have left behind. Through those windows the silly dove who lost her heart went out. Genesis 34 tells how

*Dina went out to see the women of the country; and Sichem took her and ravished her virginity*. [cf. Gen 34.1-2]

In the same way the unhappy soul is carried out through the senses of the body, to see the beauties of the world; and when she has wandered this way and that, she is seized by the devil through her consent, and ravished by her action. How different the two flights! These fly from earthly things to those above; she flies from those above to earthly things. She flies to the devil, but they to Christ.

3. So there follows: *and followed thee*. [Mt 19.27]. For your sake we have left all things and become poor. But because you are rich, we have followed you, so that you may make us rich. Most wretched of all men are those religious who have left all things, yet have not followed Christ. A double evil will fall on them. All outward comfort is absent; no inward comfort is present; if worldly men lacked the latter, at least they would have outward things. *We have followed thee*, creatures following the Creator, sons after their father, chicks to their mother, hungry men to bread, thirsty men to drink, sick men to the doctor, tired men to a place of rest, exiles to paradise. *We have followed thee*: *We run in the odour of thy ointments* [cf. Cant 1.3], because

*The sweet smell of thy ointments are above all aromatical spices* [Cant 4.10]

Natural History says that the panther has a wonderful beauty, and its smell is so sweet that it surpasses all perfumes. So, when the other animals perceive its scent, they come together at once and follow her. And they are wonderfully refreshed by her scent and by looking at her. Our Lord Jesus Christ, whose great beauty and sweetness the blessed experience in heaven, and the just taste here on earth. As soon as the Apostles sensed this sweetness, at once they left all things and followed him.

*We have followed thee; what will there be for us?* [Mt 19.27]. Job 3 says:

*As they that dig for a treasure;*

*they also rejoice exceedingly when they have found the grave*. [Job 3.21-22]

A treasure in a grave, God in the flesh taken from the Virgin. Now you have found the treasure, you Apostles, now you have it entirely. What more to you seek? *What will there be for us?* What more can there be for you? Keep what you have found, because it is all you are seeking; as Baruch 3 says:

*Where thee is wisdom, where is prudence, strength, understanding, length of days and life,*

*the light of the eyes and peace*. [cf. Bar 3.12,14]

The wisdom that created everything, the prudence that governs everything, the strength which restrains the devil, the understanding which penetrates all things. The length of life that perpetuates its followers, the food that satisfies them, the light that makes bright and the peace that gives rest.

4. There follows:

*But Jesus said to them: Amen, I say to you that you who have followed me*. [Mt 19.28]

He did not say, 'who have left everything', but, 'who have followed'. This is proper to Apostles and perfect souls. Many leave what is theirs, and yet do not follow Christ; I would say, rather, that they cling on to themselves. If you want to follow, and follow through, you must leave yourself behind. He who follows another along the way must look at that other, whom he has made his guide, not at himself. To leave oneself is to put no trust in oneself, to *regard oneself as useless, when one has done all that was commanded* [cf. Lk 17.10]; to despise oneself as 'a dead dog or a single flea' [cf. 1Kg (Sm) 24.15], to give oneself precedence over no-one in one's heart, but to reckon oneself as lower even than the greatest sinners; and to consider *all one's justices as the rag of a menstruous woman* [cf. Is 64.6]. It is to have oneself before one's eyes and mourn as for someone dead, to abase oneself in everything and cast oneself totally on God. Let us listen to what is promised to those who follow in this way.

*In the regeneration*: the first regeneration is in the soul, in Baptism; the second, on the body, is in the Judgement, when the dead shall rise incorrupt. *When the son of man shall sit* (exercising the power of judgement in the form of a servant who is judged), *on the seat of his majesty* (in the Church wherein his omnipotence shall appear), *you also shall sit on twelve seats* [Mt 19.28]. If only the twelve Apostles will sit with Christ in the judgement, sitting upon twelve thrones, where will Paul sit, that 'vessel of election' [Ac 9.15], turned today from a wolf into a lamb, he who 'laboured more than all' [cf. 1Cor 15.10], *who was caught up to the third heaven, and heard secrets which it is not granted to man to utter* [cf. 2Cor 12.2,4]? Where, pray, will so great a man sit, if there will be only twelve seats for the judges in that Judgement? He himself said, particularly, *Know you not that we shall judge angels?* [1Cor 6.3] (meaning the evil ones).

We must recognise from this that the number twelve represents the fulness of power, and the twelve tribes of Israel stand for all those to be judged. See how poor men, together with the poor Jesus, son of the poor little Virgin, will 'judge the world in equity' [cf. Ps 9.9; 95.13]. Job 36 says:

*God saveth not the wicked: and he giveth judgement for the poor*. [Job 36.5-6]

'The poor', he says, not the rich *whose glory is their shame* [Phil 3.19]. They will indeed be shamed, when they see *those whom they had sometime in derision and for a parable of reproach*.[cf. Wisd 5.3], sitting with Christ at the judgement, and sitting in judgement themselves.

[THE REWARD OF THOSE WHO RELINQUISHE EARTHLY THINGS]

5. The reward of those who relinquish transitory things: *And every one that hath left house*, etc. [Mt 19.29], that is, 'all who have preferred my love to all the affections of the flesh.'

6. Morally. The 'house' represents bad habit, the 'sisters' are wandering thoughts, the 'father' is the devil and the 'mother' sensuality. The 'wife' is the vanity of the world, the 'children' are works, and the 'field' is care. According to the order of human generation, we reckon too the generation of the sinner, who from being a child of God becomes a child of the devil. The sinner is begotten from the devil's temptation and sensual concupiscence, as from two seeds. So it says in Ezekiel 16:

*Thy father was Amorrhite and thy mother a Cethite* [Ezek 16.3]

Amorrhite means 'making bitter'. How bitter the devil is, they know who are infected with his 'sweetness'- for his sweetness is a worm. No one tastes bitterness like the person who has previously tasted a sweet drink. Habbakuk 2 says:

*Woe to him that giveth drink to his friend and presenteth his gall and making him drunk, that he may behold his nakedness! Thou art filled with shame instead of glory*. [Hab 2.15-16]

To deceive more readily, and make the sinner drink more surely, the devil first proffers the honey of delight; so that even as it is quaffed with pleasure, the bitterness of death is taken in as well. And so the sinner, the devil's friend, is stripped of God's grace here and now, and in time to come will be filled with the shame of hell instead of the glory of the world.

Cethite means 'broken', and stands for sensual desire which must be broken beneath the yoke of humility. Ecclesiasticus 33 says:

*The yoke and the thong bend a stiff neck, and continual labours bow a slave. Torture and fetters are for a malicious slave; send him to work, that he be not idle. For idleness hath taught much evil*. [Ecclus 33.27-29]

The slave is sensuality, and its pride must be bent under the yoke of humility, so that its wantonness be restrained by the torture of abstinence and the fetters of obedience.

Behold the sinner's father and mother, and his 'brothers' are the unlawful appetites of the senses. These are Joseph's brothers, who *put him an old pit* [cf. Gen 37.20]. Joseph is the human spirit, and the 'old pit' is mortal sin or hell. As John 7 puts it, these brothers want the spirit to *go up to this festival* [cf. Jn 7.8], temporal glory. Job 6 says of them:

*my brethren have passed by me, as the torrent that passeth swiftly in the valle*ys. [Job 6.15]

They run to the filthy valleys. The carnal senses rush down to the valleys of gluttony and lust, caring nothing for the misery of the spirit.

The 'sister', of the same seed as the 'brother', stands for the realm of thought. The sinner's 'sisters' are wanton thoughts of the mind, arising from the seed of the devil's suggestions, and Ezekiel 23 says of them:

*There were two women, daughters of one mother; and they committed fornication in Egypt. Their names were Oolla the elder and Ooliba her younger sister*. [Ezek 23.2-4]

There are two kinds of thought that especially corrupt the sinner's mind today. They are desire for money and lustful pleasure, which are like two sisters who commit fornication.

The 'wife' of the sinner is worldly vanity. This is Jezebel, the wife of Achab, of who is said in III Kings 21:

*His wife Jezebel set him on, and he became abominable,*

*insomuch as he followed idols*. 3(1)Kg 21.25-26]

Jezebel means 'issue of blood', or 'blood-stained', or 'dunghill'. She is the vanity of the world from which flows the blood of every sin, and which at the point of death will be turned into a dunghill. And so, I Maccabees 2 says:

*The glory of a sinful man is dung and worms. Today he is lifted up, and tomorrow he shall not be found, because he is returned into the earth, and his thought is come to nothing*. [1Mac 2.62-63]

This wife will not let her husband remain in peace, she incites him to follow idols (all kinds of sins), and so he becomes abominable to God.

7. After the devil gives his son a wife, he wants him to beget children of her, the 'grandchildren' of the devil, meaning vain and dark works, deserving eternal death. In II Esdras 13, Nehemiah says:

*I saw Jews that married Moabite wives: and their children spoke in the speech of Azotus,*

*and could not speak the Jews' language*. [Neh 13.23-24]

Moab means 'from the father', and Azotus 'blaze' or 'fire'. Today, many Christians and religious take 'wives', worldly vanities, begotten of the devil, by who they produce 'children' (works) who don't know how to 'speak the Jews' language' (that is, to praise God), but only that of Azotus, the blaze of gluttony and lust, and the fire of avarice.

Behold 'a wicked and perverse generation' [Dt 32.5], to which the devil gives the house of evil custom. This is the house and iron furnace of Egypt, of which Exodus 13 says:

*Remember this day in which you came forth out of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage*. [Ex 13.3]

The 'day' is the sun shining upon the earth, the 'sun' being the grace of God which, when it enlightens the mind, sets free from the bondage of bad habit. 'This day' the sinner should remember that he is already freed, and he should give thanks always.

The devil also gives the 'field' of earthly care: one's 'field' is whatever one works in. Genesis 4 says that:

*Cain said to Abel his brother: Let us go forth abroad. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and slew him*. [Gen 4.8]

Cain means 'possession', and Abel 'struggle' [Gen 4.1]. In the field of earthly care, the possession of riches kills the struggle of penitence. This is *Haceldama, that is to say, the field of blood* [Ac 1.19]. And the text speaks of 'fields' rather than 'field', because earthly cares are many.

Whoever leaves all these *shall receive an hundredfold* [Mt 19.29], spiritually, here and now; for this is what they are worth in comparison, like a hundred compared to a handful. Mark says:

*A hundred times as much now in this time, with persecutions,* [Mk 10.30]

Meaning that he will taste the joy of the kingdom even in this life full of persecutions,

*And in the future everlasting life.* [Mt 19.29]

May he who is blessed for ever lead us into its possession.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

8. Genesis 14 tells how *Joseph commanded his silver cup to be put in the sack of the younger, Benjamin* [cf. Gen 44.1-2]. There is something similar in Proverbs 10:

*The tongue of the just is as silver.* [Prov 10.20]

Benjamin was first called Benoni, 'son of my sorrow', but afterwards Benjamin, 'son of the right hand' [cf. Gen 35.18]. He stands for blessed Paul, who says of himself in Philippians 3:

*I was circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; according to the Law a Pharisee, according to zeal persecuting the Church of God*. [Phil 3.5-6]

Behold Benoni: first he was a son of sorrow, the son of the right hand. Acts 9 says: *Saul, as yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord*, etc. [Ac 9.1]. Saul means 'temptation', and where there is temptation there is sorrow. Acts 8 says:

*Saul made havoc of the Church, entering in from house to house and dragging away men and women to prison*. [Ac 8.3]

The head of the Church was in heaven, the feet walked upon the earth, and Saul trod upon them. That is why the head in heaven cried out: *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* [Ac 9.4; 22.7]. Saul tempted, and Christ as it were sorrowed, and cried out, "Temptation, temptation, why are you persecuting me? And what will be the consequence for you? Indeed, there will be consequences! For one persecution you will receive *five times, forty stripes save one* [2Cor 11.24].You will have temptations *in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers* [cf. 2Cor 11.26]. You are a son of sorrow, and you will bear sorrow, for you will be *thrice beaten with rods, once stoned, thrice shipwrecked* [cf. 2Cor 11.25]."

We have heard about Benoni; let us now hear about Benjamin, and how he was converted today from a 'son of sorrow' into a 'son of the right hand', today lying down as a wolf and rising up as a lamb! Luke says:

*And as he went on his journey, it came to pass that he drew nigh to Damascus. And suddenly a light from heaven shined round about him. And falling on the ground he heard a voice saying to him* (in Hebrew): *Saul*, etc. [Ac 9.3-4]

Your right hand is your 'outer' hand. The right hand of the Almighty gave him such a cuff, on his neck as hard as a rhinoceros's, that he made him fall to the ground. A light from heaven shone round him at mid-day, brighter than the noon-day sun. So gentle and kind, the correction of that right hand! To strike with a scourge of light, to rebuke with a voice of gentleness: *Why persecutest thou me?* [Ac 9.4]. Today was fulfilled what the Scripture says:

*The right hand of the Lord hath wrought strength*. [Ps 117.16]

By casting down Saul the persecutor, the Lord's right hand raised him up, making a wolf into a lamb, a persecutor into a preacher of the Church.

9. *The right hand of the Lord wrought strength,* when he put the silver cup in the mouth of his sack. So it says:

*Go thy way, Ananias, for this man is to me a vessel of election, to carry my name before the Gntiles and kings and the children of Israel*. [Ac 9.15]

The silver cup is clear and eloquent wisdom; and 'Joseph' (Christ), by a special prerogative, put it in the heart and mouth of young Benjamin (Paul). Benjamin was last and least of all his brothers; and Paul, in I Corinthians 15, says:

*Last of all, he was seen also by me, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle*, etc. [1Cor 15.8-9]

His very name means 'little', you might say there was none smaller! O humility of the 'least'! He does not glory or boast about the gifts of wisdom and eloquence, the greatness of revelations and miracles, the hidden secrets he heard; he just laments the persecution of the Church which he was responsible for. *I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God* [1Cor 15.9]. Woe to us poor wretches, who turn our eyes away from the evils we have done, so as not to see them! And if there be one good deed (which is almost nothing) we have done, we gaze on it and display it to others. We ought rather to copy those false beggars who, to get money, hide their fine clothing and display their nakedness and need to the rich people of this world. In the same way, we should hide any good we have, and display the wretchedness of our guilt and weakness, so as to receive the gift of grace from the Lord.

So let us give thanks to Jesus of Nazareth, who today made for us a wonderful teacher out of a persecutor; and may he enlighten us with his teaching, he who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

10. *Joseph commanded his silver cup to be put,* etc. Let us see what is meant, morally,

by Benjamin, his sack and the mouth of the sack, and the silver cup.

Benjamin is the penitent who is at first 'son of sorrow'. He says: *My sorrow is continually before me* [Ps 37.18]. Note that he says, 'before me'. It is said[2] that the ostrich lays her eggs in front of herself, and gazes upon them with a fixed and constant look; by gazing she warms them, and so the eggs hatch. In the same way the penitent should keep his works firmly before his mind, and often carefully consider them with sorrow, so as to produce from them the fruits of repentance. He who keeps himself before himself, will find in himself nothing but sorrow. Yet wretched sinners behave like apes, who (Natural History tells us) delight in the full moon and are sad when it wanes; and who carry the young they favour in front of them, putting the neglected ones behind them.

"Just like the moon, so varies fortune's game:

It waxes, it wanes, it never stays the same."[3]

When worldly fortune is full, carnal folk rejoice. So Job 21 says:

*They dance and play;*

*they take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ.*

*They spend their days in good things, and in a moment they go down to hell*. [Job 21.11-13]

A point pricks; at the point of death worldlings are pricked strongly by the devil, so that they are forced to jump out of the bed they are lying on into hell. When he shows them the crescent moon of adversity, they are sad. Adversity casts them down, prosperity lifts them up. These folk bear their 'children' (the glory of the world, the gluttony and lust of the flesh, which they love) in their breasts. They put the sorrow of penitence and the misery of this life behind them, where they cannot see them.

But let us hear what Benoni does: he says, *My sorrow is continually before me*. Because he loves sorrow, he keeps it in his sight and looks at himself in it as in a mirror, observing his defects. So Jeremiah says: *Set thee up a watch-tower: make to thee bitterness: direct thy heart into the right way* [Jer 31.21]. Note the three words, 'set', 'make' and 'direct'. One follows from another. He who sets the mirror of his life before himself makes bitterness for himself, and he directs his heart in the way of right action. And so, if he was Benoni, he will be Benjamin too, the son of the right hand.

11. Note that this right hand has two aspects: it is grace now, and glory to come. Apocalypse 1 says of the right hand of grace:

*in his right hand he had seven stars.* [Apoc 1.16]

These seven stars are referred to in the reading at Mass, where we read of Saul that suddenly a light from heaven shone round him; he fell to the ground, and when he rose entered the city. He received his sight, and Baptism; he took food, and preached Jesus [cf. Ac 9.3-4,8,18-18,20]. The first of these denotes prevenient grace, the second the consideration of our frailty, the third the knowledge of our own sin, the fourth the cleansing of our conscience, the fifth the shedding of tears, the sixth the sweetness of contemplation, and the seventh the proclamation of the word, or thanksgiving. Let us look at each of these.

When the sinner draws near to Damascus (meaning 'drink of blood'), in other words, when he is close to incorporating the uncleanness of sin within himself, all at once (for he knows not where it comes from or where it goes) a light from heaven shines round him, of which Job 38 says:

*Show me where light dwelleth, and where is the place of darkness;*

*that thou mayest bring every thing to its own bounds*. [cf. Job 38.18-20]

The light is grace; the place of darkness is the sinner's blinded mind; the bounds of sin are its ending. When the sinners mind is enlightened by grace, sin comes to an end.

*He fell to the ground*. The Psalm says:

*All they that go down to the earth shall fall before him*. [Ps 21.30]

This is as though to say, he who considers his own frailty humbles himself in the sight of God.

*He entered the city*. Thus: *I walked sorrowful all the day long* [Ps 37.7]. Fighting outside, guilt inside. If someone suffered an injury out of doors, and on going into his house found it dirty and untidy, would he not be sad and sorrowful? Of course he would! So the sinner who notices the malice of the world without, and knows the uncleanness of his conscience within, walks sorrowful all the day. Note that it says 'all the day'. Before the sun's ray enters the house, you cannot see the dust in the air; but once the sun's ray enters, you see that it is full of dust! The ray is knowledge, which shows a man the faults of his own conscience, and subtly reveals what at first was hidden. And it says 'all the day', because one should continually walk sorrowfully, not just now and then. He who wants to know his own wretchedness must walk within all day, not just half the day. And because from this sadness there arises the cleansing of the conscience, we come to the fourth point.

*He received his sight.* Luke continues: *And immediately there fell from his eyes as it were scales* [Ac 9.18]. There is something similar in Tobias 11:

*A white skin began to come out of his eyes, like the skin of an egg; and Tobias took hold of it, and drew it from his eyes. And immediately he recovered his sight*. [Tob 11.14-15]

The ‘scales’ are the impurities of the mind; the ‘skin of an egg’ is vainglory, as in Lamentations 1: *Her virgins are in affliction* [Lam 1.4], where the word actually means ‘scabby’. ‘Scabies’ in a man is like scales on a fish or a snake. It is as though he said, even though they be virgins in body, they are scabby by the itching of an impure mind. The ‘skin of an egg’, thin and white, is vainglory, which is very subtle, because when someone knows he is thought devout, a tendency to vainglory arises. It is ‘white’, appearing outwardly delightful. But it is an artificial whiteness, not one that comes from nature. These two blind men, but by God’s grace they are rescued, their conscience is cleansed and their sight returns.

*He received Baptism*. In Judith 12 it says that Judith *went out by night into the valley of Bethulia, and washed herself in a fountain of water* [Jdth 12.7]. Judith means ‘confessing’, and Bethulia is ‘the house giving birth to the Lord’. The night stands for the time of quiet, while the valley is humility and the fountain is tears. The penitent who confesses goes out from inward and outward clamour, literally by night, or at least in silence, to the valley of Bethulia, the humility of conscience which gives birth to the Lord in contrition (as to himself) and in preaching (to others); and there he washes himself in the fountain of tears.

*He took food*. Ecclesiasticus 15 says: *She fed him with the bread of life and understanding* [Ecclus 15.3]. Note that the sweetness of contemplation is two-fold. One is in the affection, and this is ‘life’; the other is in the mind, and this is ‘understanding’. The one consists in the ‘elevation’ of the mind, the other in the ‘alienation’ of the mind. "The elevation of the mind is when the vivacity of the intelligence, divinely irradiated, passes beyond the limits of human industry, yet does not pass into alienation of the mind, so that it sees what is above it, and yet hardly recedes from what it is accustomed to. Alienation of the mind is when the remembrance of present things is removed from the mind, and the state of the mind passes by the transfiguration of the divine operation into a pilgrim way, untrodden by human industry."[4] Those who are refreshed and strengthened by such food can well preach Jesus, or give him thanks. The Psalm says:

*The poor shall eat and be filled: and they shall praise the Lord*. [Ps 21.27]

The poor (that is, the humble) first ‘eat’ in the understanding, and are ‘filled’ in their affection, and then they can praise the Lord.

These are the seven stars in Christ’s right hand, and his son is Benjamin who was formerly Benoni.

12. This Benjamin is called ‘younger’, because he is less than the rest of his brothers; this stands for the humility of the penitent. So I Kings 16 says of David:

*There remaineth yet a young one, who keepeth the sheep*. [1Kg(Sm) 16.11]

Only humility of conscience can keep the sheep of innocence. Old Joseph ordered his silver cup to be put into the mouth of the sack of this Benjamin. The silver cup is the resonant confession of sins, which the penitent should fill with the wine of compunction and offer to Jesus Christ. In II Esdras 2, Nehemiah says: *I took up the wine and gave it to the king; and was as one languishing away before his face* [Neh 2.1]. In Canticles 5 the Bride says:

*I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem* (heavenly virtues)*, if you find my beloved,*

*that you tell him I languish with love*. [Cant 5.8]

He who languishes with the love of Christ, offers him the wine of compunction. Note that it says ‘I took up’. Hypocrites do not ‘lift’ compunction, they put it down, because they shed tears from vainglory.

This silver cup is put in the ‘mouth’, not the bottom. The rough sack is the contrite heart, of which Jonah 3 says that the king of Ninive *was clothed with sack-cloth and sat in ashes*. [Jon 3.6]. Ninive means ‘beautiful’. It is the vanity of the world, which is like mud covered in snow. Its ‘king’ is the penitent who treads it down. Clad in sack-cloth, he sits in ashes, because in contrition of heart he ponders how he will end in ashes. He carries the silver cup in his mouth, he does not hide it at the bottom, being always ready to accuse himself. Note that it says ‘his cup’. You should attribute the grace of confession to Christ, not to yourself; everything good in you comes from him.

To him, then, be honour and glory, who from Benoni made Benjamin, from a son of sorrow a son of grace now ,and will make him a son of glory hereafter. Then, with those standing on the right, he will deserve to hear: *Come, ye blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom* [cf. Mt 25.34]. May he deign to grant this, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] ABBOT GAUFRIDUS, *Declamationes*, II,2; PL 184.438

[2] e.g. by NECKHAM, *De naturis rerum*, 50

[3] NOVATUS, *Songs*, 1183. See also above, p72.

[4] RICHARD OF ST VICTOR, *Beniamin maior*, 5,2; PL 196.170

# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE PURIFICATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

1. At that time: *After the days of the purification of Mary were completed*, etc. [Lk 2.22]

In this Gospel three things are noted: the offering of Jesus Christ in the temple, the fulfilment of the expectation of the just Simeon, and his blessing.

[THE OFFERING OF JESUS CHRIST]

2. The offering of Jesus Christ: *After the days*, etc. In this first clause, three things are noted morally; namely the purifying of the soul, its offering, and afterwards its entry into the heavenly temple. But first, let us look at the historical meaning.

*The Lord spoke to Moses,* in Leviticus 12*, saying:*

*If a woman having received seed shall bear a man child, she shall be unclean seven days*. [Lev 12.1-2]

This is in distinction to her who gave birth as a virgin. Neither the child nor the mother needed to be purified by sacrifices; it was to free us from the fear of the Law, that is, from keeping a law which is observed in fear. It was laid down that a boy should be circumcised on the eighth day, and be taken to the temple on the thirty-third day after his circumcision, and that sacrifices should be offered for him, namely a year-old lamb; or if she could not lay her hand on a lamb, she should offer two turtle-doves or two young pigeons. Further to this, Josephus says that the first-born should be redeemed with five shekels."[1] The blessed and poor little Mary offered the poor sacrifice for her poor Son, that the Lord’s humility might by all this be made manifest.

So the words, *Every male opening the womb*, etc. [Lk 2.23], must be understood like this. We read in Exodus 13:

*Thou shalt set apart all that openeth the womb for the Lord; and all that is first brought forth of thy cattle. Whatsoever thou shalt have of the male sex, thou shalt consecrate to the Lord*. [Ex 13.12]

"The first-born of the sons of Levi were offered and not redeemed, and the ever served the Lord. The other first-born were offered and redeemed. The first-born of cattle fit for sacrifice were offerings of the priests. Those of unclean animals were not offered, but they were redeemed- so that the first-born of an ass was exchanged for a sheep, which was offered instead. Some animals were killed and not redeemed, such as the first-born of a dog."[2]

3. *After the days of the purification of Mary were completed*. Mary (whose name means ‘enlightened’ or ‘bitter sea’, or ‘sovereign lady’) is any just soul which is enlightened in Baptism, a bitter sea in a contrite heart and afflicted body, and who will be a sovereign lady in the kingdom, when she will be joined to the eternal king. But meanwhile, while she is in this exile, she needs purification because she contracts many stains. So Ecclesiasticus 7 says:

*Purify thyself with thy arms, and for thy negligences purify thyself with a few*. [Ecclus 7.33,34]

To purify is to remove all stains and leave only what is pure. Thorough purification is to purify oneself before the judgement ‘with arms’, that is, works of mercy; and to purify oneself from one’s neglect of the commandments ‘with a few’, for there are few who so purify themselves.

Natural History says that doves remove the dung of their chicks from the nest, and purify it; and when the chicks grow up, they teach them to throw out the dung. In the same way, just men purify their own and their subordinates’ uncleannesses, and teach them to cleanse their own. So Jeremiah 9 says:

*Teach your daughters wailing, and every one her neighbour mourning.*

*For death is come up through our windows: it is entered into our houses*. [Jer 9.20-21]

This as if to say, mortal sin enters the soul by the bodily senses, but it is cast out by medicine, the lament of penitence. When someone feels himself suffering from sickness, he accepts a purge in order to get better. So Ecclesiasticus 38 says:

*The Most High hath created medicines out of the earth:*

*and a wise man will not abhor them*. [Ecclus 38.4]

The earth is the flesh, and the medicine is penance. Some cures are made from the flesh of serpents, and penance, the medicine of the soul, is made from our flesh. However bitter it may be, a prudent man who feels the sickness of sin affecting him will not shrink from drinking it, because by drinking the bitter potion he becomes well again. It is a great foolishness, to let slip health because of bitterness, and risk death. Proverbs

says:

*It is nought, it is nought, saith every buyer:*

*and when he is gone away, then he will boast*. [Prov 20.14]

Every sick person says, *The drink shall be bitter to them that drink it* [Is 24.9]; but when the sickness passes, he will rejoice. So, too, every sinner says that penance is bitter; but when his soul is purged of guilt, he will rejoice in heavenly glory.

4. Let us say, then: *After the days of the purification of Mary were completed*. The soul which is so purified and cleansed must offer *a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons* [Lk 2.24]. The ‘pair of turtle-doves’ stand for the two kinds of chastity, and the ‘two young pigeons’ for the two kinds of compunction. Let us look at each of these.

The turtle-dove, from its voice, is deemed a modest bird; if it loses its mate, it does not seek another. It wanders lonely and sighing, and loves solitary places. In the winter it comes down to the valleys, and losing its feathers it lives in hollow tree-trunks. In the summer it goes up the mountains and makes its nest there. In the same way, the penitent who is modest by continence in mind and body should seek the society of no mortal sin; for, as Isaiah 28 says:

*The bed is straitened so that one must fall out:*

*and a short covering cannot cover both*. [Is 28.20]

This is as if to say that the conscience of the just man is so constrained by the fear of God, that the devil can find no rest therein; because the saints who, as Job 3 says, *curse the day* (worldly prosperity), *are ready to raise up Leviathan* [Job 3.8]. The cloak of divine grace, though it be very wide, always seems short to a man, and it cannot cover both, that is, both husband and adulterer (mortal sin). The just man, *while he is in the body, is absent from the Lord* [cf. 2Cor 5.6]; he is deprived of his beloved. So he wanders alone, not mingling with the noisy crowd, sighing and saying:

*Lord, all my desire is before thee: and my groaning is not hidden from thee*. [Ps 37.10]

He loves solitude of mind and body, saying:

*Lo, I have gone far off, flying away, and I abode in the wilderness*. [Ps 54.8]

In the winter of our present misery, he loses the feathers of temporalities, and is content with drab clothing; but when the summer of eternal glory arrives, he will fly to the mountains of his heavenly home.

Again, the pigeon has a sigh for a song, because its intestine is full of gall, and from the great bitterness it seems to groan. Some say it has no gall-bladder, but it does not have its gall in the same place as other birds. It does not injure anything, nor does it live on carrion. It feeds the chicks of others, choosing pure grain. It lives beside running water, to hide from the hawk. It builds its nest in the clefts of the rock. In the same way, the penitent groans with sorrow, being full of the bitterness of contrition. He says:

*I will cry like a young swallow, I will meditate like a dove*. [Is 38.14]

Natural History says that if a young swallow's eyes are pulled out, they grow again. The penitent who loses the eye of divine love cries out to recover it; for, *in the bitterness of his soul he will remember the years of his life* [cf. Is 38.15]. He does not repay evil with evil; he does not live on the carrion of robbery; rather, he shares what he has with others- he rescues sinners from the devil and feeds them with the food of eternal life. He selects the grain of the Catholic Faith, dwelling by floods of tears, to protect himself from the devil's deceits. He builds his nest in the wounds of Christ, wherein he places both the nest of his hope and the chicks of his works.

Alternatively, the Gloss says: "He who cannot find a lamb, that is, the riches of an innocent life, should have recourse to tears of compunction, which are denoted by birds, on account of their groaning. There are two sorts of compunction, according as we fear punishment from the remembrance of our evil deeds, or burn with desire for heavenly things and groan at their delay. So we are bidden to offer two birds, one for a holocaust, when we are afire with heavenly love, and the other for sin, when we groan for the evil we have done."

Again, the first-fruits represent the good works we do at the beginning of our conversion, which we as it were carry in our heart, and which we should attribute to the grace of God. We are bidden to redeem our evil deeds with the fruits of repentance.

Again, the five shekels with which we redeem our first-born are: to sorrow over our past deeds, to lay them bare in confession, to share our neighbour's sorrow, to have fear in all things, and to persevere to the end.

Whoever is purified in this way, and offered with such sacrifices or redeemed with such a price, without a doubt he will be received by the hands of angels in the heavenly temple.

[THE FULFILMENT OF THE JUST SIMEON'S EXPECTATION]

5. The fulfilment of the expectation of the just Simeon: *And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon*, [Lk 2.25] whose name means 'hearing grief'. He stands for the penitent who, whether eating or drinking or doing anything else, hears that terrible voice which says, "Arise, O dead, and come to judgement." He says with Job, in the last chapter:

*With the hearing of the ear I have heard thee; but now my eye seeth thee.*

*Therefore I reprehend myself, and do penance in dust and ashes*. [Job 42.5-6]

He does not say ‘with the ear’, but ‘with the hearing of the ear’. The fool, like an ass, hears only the sound of the divine word; but the wise man perceives its force and keeps it in his heart. Natural History says that if the ears of deer are erect, they hear most keenly; but if their ears are down, they hear nothing. Those who are of the world turn their ears to the world, and so cannot hear; as it is said:

*You hear them not, because you are not of God.* [Jn 8.47]

Just men, because they are of God, lift up their ears to hear grief. Grief is ‘sorrow with silence’. With the hearing of the ear I have heard you preaching, *Do penance*, etc. [Mt 4.17]; and now my eye sees you hanging on the cross. Alternatively, I heard you say in the judgement, *I was thirsty*, etc. [Mt 25.35]; and my eye sees you sitting, terrible, upon the throne of your majesty. I reprehend myself in confession and do penance in humility of mind and affliction of body.

This Simeon is in ‘Jerusalem’, because his conversation is in heaven.

*And this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost was in him*. [Lk 2.25]

The just man is so called, because he does what is right and lives according to the law. Servile fear is to refrain from evil out of fear of punishment, not love of justice. Charity casts it out, when a man does not love iniquity even when he can escape punishment. Chaste fear is when the soul fears to lose grace; and this brings it about that it takes no pleasure in sin, and it would fear that grace would abandon it even though it suffered no punishment. Charity does not cast out this fear, because it endures for ever and ever. Fear should be greater when wandering afar, less as one draws near, not at all when one arrives. The penitent is just in himself, and with devout fear towards God, waiting with filial fear for the consolation not only of himself, but of his neighbour. Thus, the Holy Spirit is in him, by whose inspiration he receives the sure response that he will not taste eternal death, but will see Christ face to face.

*And he came by the Spirit into the temple* [Lk 2.27]. The temple, ‘amply roofed’, protects with its roof the ample number it takes in. The temple is charity towards God and neighbour. That towards God protects, that towards neighbour receives. No one can enter this temple except by the spirit, not by the flesh; for, *God is a spirit* [Jn 4.24], and, *It is the spirit that quickeneth*; *the flesh profiteth nothing* [cf. Jn 6.64].

6. There follows:

*And when his parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law*. [Lk 2.27]

Note that it says ‘the child Jesus’, not ‘Jesus as a child’. The Gloss says, "Since ‘childhood’ begins after the seven years of infancy, Jesus is often called a child, not because of his age, but because of his servitude[3]. The Prophet says, *Behold my servant* [Mt 12.18; cf. Is 42.1], because

*The son of man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister* [Mt 20.28]

He was for us, then, first a servant serving us, as Isaiah 43:

*Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins: thou hast wearied me with thy iniquities*. [Is 43.24]

For thirty-three years he served us faithfully, and laboured for us so greatly that he sweated blood, and in the end suffered death for love of us. O my dearest brothers, what reward can we give so faithful a servant? *What can be worthy of his benefits?* [Tob 12.2]. Certainly, we can say what Tobias said to Raphael:

*If I should give myself to be thy servant,*

*I should not make a worthy return for thy care*. [Tob 9.2]

What reward have we unhappy men given him? He says in the Psalm:

*They repaid me evil for good, to the sterility of my soul*; [Ps 34.12]

Because we do not allow the blood of his Passion to be fruitful in us. He laid down his own life, to gain our souls; but we deprive them of this fruit, when we give ourselves to the devil by mortal sin. It well speaks of the ‘child Jesus’; first he served us, then he saved us. No one can be ‘Jesus’ (‘saving’) unless he is first ‘child’ (‘serving’).

[HIS BLESSING]

7. His blessing: *He took him into his arms* [Lk 2.28]. Great is the humility of the Saviour! He who is not constrained by place is carried in the arms of an old man! An old man held the child, to teach us that *we should put off the old man, who is corrupted, and put on him who is created according to God* [cf. Col 3.9-10]. He carries Christ in his arms, who embraces the word of God not only with his mouth but in works of charity; as Job did, saying in chapter 13:

*I tear my flesh with my teeth, and carry my soul in my hands*. [Job 13.14]

Our teeth divide our food, and they represent the rebukes and accusations of confession, with which the just man tears his flesh (his carnal actions), and so carries his soul in the arms of his works, ready to return it to his Creator whenever it is asked for. Then he will bless God with Simeon:

*Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace*. [Lk 2.29]

The servant who has served long, and laboured long, is dismissed in peace by the Lord, according to the word of peace. Stephen ‘ fell asleep in the Lord’ [Ac 7.60]. The Lord’s word is:

*Come to me, all you that labour and are burdened; and I will refresh you* [cf. Mt 11.28]

According to your word, dismiss your servant now in peace. Behold the child who is Jesus, the servant and salvation, because he is dismissed in peace. Now you may dismiss me, because until now I have laboured and waited; but now, at the end of my misery, you may dismiss your servant.

So Job 39 says:

*Who hath sent out the wild ass free, and who hath loosed his bonds?*

*To whom I have given a house in the wilderness,*

*and his dwelling in the barren land*. [Job 39.5-6]

The wild ass is the penitent, to whom God gives a house in this present miserable life in solitude of mind; and also a soldier’s tent from which he can fight and resist in bitterness of heart. Jeremiah says of these two: *From the presence of thy hand I sat alone, because thou hast filled me with bitterness* [cf. Jer 15.17]. The Lord gives him this in this life; and at death, free from guilt, he dismisses him and looses the bonds of punishment. Now, then, *thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace*.

8. *Because my eyes have seen thy salvation* [Lk 2.30]. Note that God is seen in three ways: he is seen by faith and by contemplation on earth, and face to face in heaven. These three are ‘air’, ‘water’, and ‘earth’. Natural History says that birds flying in the air need sharp vision, because they see their food from very high up. Fish have watery eyes, because they need to see clearly in the dense water. Birds which remain on the ground, and do not fly, such as the hen, etc., do not need keen sight. The ‘birds in the air’ are the angelic virtues in heaven, which from the heights of heaven gaze with keen and clear sight upon God their food, *on whom the angels desire to look* [1Pt 1.12].The ‘fish in the waters’ are contemplatives in their tears. Their ‘watery eyes’ are the insights of a devout mind, which sees much because of the density of the water (that is, of contemplation); it is ‘dense’ and impenetrable, unless the contemplative vision is full of

devotion. Their eyes see the salvation of God. The 'birds on the ground' are active souls who feed their chicks like hens. They do not see much keenly, but the still see the salvation of God.

*Which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples* [Lk 2.31]. This is **concordant** to Isaiah 52:

*The Lord hath prepared his holy arm in the sight of all the Gentiles.* [Is 52.10]

The Father's 'arm' is the Son, ready to embrace the prodigal son who returns to him. So Luke 15 says:

*Running to him he fell upon his neck and kissed him.* [Lk 15.20]

In the first Advent, the Father prepared the Son 'before the face of all peoples', so that they might believe and love. In the second, he will prepare him so that *Every people shall see him* [cf. Apoc 1.7], and, *He will render to each one according to his works* [cf. Mt 16.27; Rom 2.6].

*A light to the revelation of the Gentiles* [Lk 2.32]. This is the Saviour himself, by grace in this present life. So in Isaiah 42, the Father says:

*I have given thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles*. [Is 42.6-7]

And Job 12:

*He discovereth deep things out of darkness,*

*and bringeth up to light the shadow of death*. [Job 12.22]

He who is 'light' in the present will be, in the future, *The glory of his people Israel* [Lk 2.32], those who see God. May he grant us this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

9. *The bee is small among flying things: but her fruit hath the chiefest sweetness*. [Ecclus 11.3]

Natural History says that the bee generates without coupling, because she contains the power of generation. The good bee is small, rounded, dense and compact; she is cleaner than other flying creatures or animals, and because of this a bad smell annoys her, while a sweet scent delights her. She flees from no animal, and when she flies she does not go to different flowers, or leave one and visit another; she gathers from the one she goes to and then returns to the hive. Her food is honey, for she lives on what she

makes. She makes a house in which the king remains, and begins to construct the walls of the hive at the top, coming down little by little until she reaches the bottom of the hive.

In the same way our Lady, blessed Mary, gave birth to the Son of God without defilement, because *The Holy Ghost came upon her, and the power of the Most High overshadowed her* [cf. Lk 1.35]. This good bee was 'small' in her humility, 'rounded' in contemplation of heavenly glory (which has no beginning or end), 'dense' in charity (since she who bore Charity in her womb for nine months could not lack charity), 'compact' in poverty, and purer than others by her virginity. That is why, if one may put it this way, the stink of lust offends her, while the sweet scent of virginity or chastity pleases her. And so he who would please the blessed Virgin should shun lust and practice chastity. She flees no animal (that is, no sinner), rather she welcomes all those who have recourse to her, and so is called 'Mother of mercy'. She is merciful to those in misery, the hope of the hopeless.

In Canticles 2 the Bridegroom says: *I am the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys*. [Cant 2.1]. Blessed Mary chose this flower, leaving all others, clinging to it and receiving whatever she needed from it. Nazareth, where she conceived, means 'flower', and she chose this place above all others. The 'flower which sprang from the root of Jesse' [cf. Is 11.1] loves a flowery homeland. The food of blessed Mary was her Son, the honey of the angels and sweetness of all the saints. She lived from the one she nourished. The one she suckled gave her life.

This good bee prepared a house: her mind by humility, and her flesh by virginity, in which the king of angels might dwell. And notice how the bee begins to build from above, because the blessed Virgin began to build not from below (in the sight of men), but from above (in the eyes of the divine majesty); and little by little, discretely and in due order, she began to come down to human attention, so that being already chosen in God's sight, she might become admirable in human sight.

10. Let us say, then: *The bee is small among flying things.* While many virtues shone out excellently in blessed Mary, humility shone with even more excellence. So she refers to it as though forgetting all the rest: *He regarded the humility of his handmaid* [Lk 1.48], and so it is called 'small among flying things'. The 'flying things' are her merits, flying up to the highest heaven. The last chapter of Proverbs says:

*Many daughters have gathered together riches* (i.e. virtues):

*thou hast surpassed them all* (because humility flies higher than all). [Prov 31.29]

While she was endowed with so many riches of virtues, and was lifted up by so many prerogatives of merit, our bee was 'small' (that is, humble), she who today offered her honeycomb to God in the temple today, the Word Incarnate, God and man.

The honeycomb consists of honey and wax, and in the child Jesus was divinity and

humanity. Natural History says that good honey comes from new wax, and good honey is like gold. The 'new wax' is Christ's flesh, taken from the flesh of the most pure and glorious Virgin. In it was held the honey of divinity, symbolised by gold. So Canticles 5 says:

*The beloved's head is as the finest gold.* [Cant 5.11]

*The head of Christ is God* [1Cor 11.3]; and so today we go in procession, carrying candles in our hands, lit from new fire. This represents the procession which Mary and Joseph made today, carrying the child Jesus to the temple, while Simeon and Anna prophesied and praised.

The Psalm says of this procession:

*Mercy and truth have met each other: justice and peace have kissed*. [Ps 84.11]

The mercy of our salvation, in the Redeemer; the truth of the promise, in Simeon whom the Holy Spirit had promised that *he would not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord* [cf. Lk 2.26]. Justice, in blessed Mary and Joseph; peace, in Anna the prophetess, *who departed not from the temple, by fastings and prayers serving night and day*. [Lk 2.37]. And so today mercy came into the temple, and truth went to meet it; because Simeon took the child Jesus, and their justice and peace kissed. A kiss indicates unity and concord: what Mary and Joseph believed, Anna confessed, and so they came together in one spirit.

Note the three parts of a candle: the wax, the wick, and the flame. The wax is Christ's flesh, the wick his Passion, and the flame of fire the power of his divinity. "Deck your chamber, Sion, and welcome Christ the king,"[4] so that as you represent him today by the candle, you may carry him in your heart. The wax stands for purity of mind, the wick for affliction of body, and the flame for the ardour of charity. He who carries it thus, represents well. Glory and honour, then, be to the virgin bee, who today offered the honeycomb to God.

There follows, regarding her: *but her fruit hath the chiefest sweetness.* The fruit of the bee is the Son of the Virgin. *Blessed is the fruit of thy womb* [Lk 1.42], it says; and Canticles 2: *His fruit was sweet to my palate* [Cant 2.3]. This fruit is sweet in its beginning, middle and end. It was sweet in the womb, sweet in the crib, sweet in the temple, sweet in Egypt, sweet in his Baptism, sweet in the desert, sweet in word, sweet in miracles, sweet on the ass, sweet in the scourging, sweet on the Cross, sweet in the tomb, sweet in hell and sweet in heaven. O sweet Jesus, what is more sweet than you are?

"Jesu- the very thought is sweet… sweeter than honey far."[5]

Name of sweetness, name of salvation. What else is 'Jesus' but 'Saviour'? Therefore,

kind Jesus, for your own name's sake be 'Jesus' to us; so that you who have given the beginning of sweetness, faith, may give hope and charity. So, living and dying in them, we may be found fit to come to you; grant this by the prayers of your Mother, you who are blessed for ever. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

11. *The bee is small among flying things*. The bee is said to be born without feet ('*a-pes'*), and later bees fasten themselves to one another with their feet. Natural History says that the smaller bees do the more work, and have four delicate wings, being black or burnt in colour. The fancy bees are those which do no work, living alone and seeking solitude, and doing nothing good. The worker bees take willow-flowers and line the surface of the hive with them, which they do only to keep out harmful animals. If the entrances to the hive are too big, they make them narrower. In the winter they prefer a warm place, in the summer a cool one. They recognise winter and rain; the reason being that they do not go out at these times, flying outside the hives; but they do fly inside the hives. This is how bee-keepers know when it is going to rain. Note that three things are particularly harmful to bees: wind, smoke and small creatures. When there is a strong wind, the bee-keepers immediately cover the openings of the hives, so that the wind cannot get in. When they want to take honey from the bees, they smoke them out, because smoke is hurtful to them. There are tiny creatures that injure them; strong bees kill them and rid the hive of them; but other bees are weakened by the activity of these creatures. Let us look at each of these matters.

The bee is any just man, whose 'feet' are affections of charity, which grace, not nature, gives him; for, *we are all by nature children of wrath* [cf. Eph 2.3]. Just men are bound to one another by these feet, as the Apostle says: *with honour preventing one another* [Rom 12.10]. Apocalypse 10 says that *the feet of the angel were as pillars of fire* [Apoc 10.1]. In this way, the feet of any just man or Christian should be pillars of fire which support the frailty of others and burn with love for God.

Again, it is the small bee, the humble man, who does most work. So David says in I Kings 17: *I thy servant have killed both a lion and a bear*. [1Kg(Sm) 17.36]. He who calls himself a servant shows his humility. The lion represents pride, the bear lust. Only the man who has tried to do so knows how hard it is to kill these two in himself. Note that he mentions the lion first, because unless pride of heart is first overcome, the lust of the flesh will not be conquered. The four wings of the just man are contempt of self, despising the world, zeal for his neighbour and desire for the kingdom. Alternatively, they are the four chief virtues by which he is lifted above the earth and gazes keenly at the heavens. His colour is black or burnt, as Lamentations 4 says:

*Their face is made blacker than coals, and they are not known in the streets*. [Lam 4.8]

The little poor man of Christ is a dead coal, whose face is blackened by hunger and thirst, toil and sweat; and who is therefore not recognised in the 'streets' (the glory) of the

world.

The ‘fancy bees’ are vain religious and hypocrites, who glory in the ornament of their outward reputation and observance of tradition; who live individualistically, and seek to be individualistic. They do no good, because they want to please the gaze of men.

The worker bees, etc. The willow stands for the bitterness of abstinence, vigils and tears. Penitents afflict their body with these, and as it were anoint them, against the harmful animals of lust and desire. Carnal folk anoint themselves with honey, temporal sweetness, and so they are covered with many flies of evil thoughts and temptations, which flee from the just who anoint themselves with bitterness. The Apostle says, *Our flesh had no rest* [2Cor 7.5]. If the entrances of the hive (the bodily senses) become too wide by wantonness and curiosity, they restrain and narrow them.

*Enter into thy chamber* (your conscience),

*and, having shut the door* (of your senses),

*pray to thy Father in secret.* [Mt 6.6]

In the ‘winter’, the time of adversity, they prefer a warm place- a virtuous spirit, so that adversity may not cast them down. In ‘summer’, the time of prosperity, they prefer a cool place, a stable spirit which is not puffed up or melted away by prosperity. Warmth melts, cold restrains and solidifies.

They recognise winter and rain, that is, they foresee temptation. So Job 39 says:

*He smelleth the battle afar off,*

*the encouraging of the captains, and the shouting of the army*. [Job 39.25]

The ‘captains’ are crafty temptations which seem to encourage reasonably under an appearance of virtue. The ‘army’ is carnal appetite, which openly howls like a wolf. But the just man, sniffing them out with discretion, spots them both from afar and avoids them both.

The reason being, etc. When the just see temptation drawing near, they do not go out by the bodily senses, but gather themselves within themselves, and fly inwardly by contemplation. Wisdom 8 says:

*When I go into my house* (my conscience), *I shall repose with wisdom,* [Wisd 8.16]

which is savoured and experienced in contemplation.

And note that three things especially harm just men: the first being wind of pride, and when it blows, the just men who are keepers of themselves must shut the openings of the hives (the bodily senses), lest harm befall. Job says:

*A violent wind came on a sudden from the side of the desert, and shook the four corners of the house; and it fell and crushed his children*. [Job 1.19]

Job ('grieving') is the penitent; his children are his works, his house is his conscience, and its four corners are the four virtues. The 'side of the desert' is the devil's malice, and when the blast of pride blows from it, it shakes the house so that it falls, and in falling crushes the works of penance; for,

*Before destruction the heart is exalted; and pride has a fall*. [cf. Prov 18.12]

Secondly, there is the smoke of avarice, which blinds the eyes of the wise. When the demons want to steal peace of mind, they apply the smoke of cupidity. So, in Judges 19, it says that *Abimelech* (whose name means 'my father is king'),

*with all his people, cut down the branches of trees, and set fire to them burnt the fort, in which were men, women and children; and it came to pass that with the smoke and fire a thousand persons were killed*. [cf. Jg 9.48-49]

The tree is the world, its branches are riches and pleasures. The devil, who is father and *king over all the children of pride* [Job 41.25], with all his demonic people, tears riches and pleasures from the world, to which he applies the fire of avarice. Alas! How many thousands of men and women he kills with the smoke of cupidity!

Thirdly, the little creatures are the stirrings of the flesh or impure thoughts, which hurt just men. If they are strong and constant they kill them and cast them away; but if they are weak and feeble, there works will be weak, because they are enfeebled by impure thoughts and impulse of the flesh.

Having discussed these qualities of bees, let us return to our subject.

12. *The bee is small among flying things*. The 'flying things' are the saints. Regarding them, see Matthew 6:

*Behold the birds of the air* (because they seek heaven by contemplation).

*They neither sow* vanity

*nor do they reap* the whirlwind, fruit of such seed,

*nor gather* damnation *into the barns* of hell. [Mt 6.26]

Among such flying things is the little bee, the humble penitent, who reckons herself unworthy of their company, and makes herself small among them. Then there follows: *but her fruit hath the chiefest sweetness.* The Psalm says:

*And he shall be like a tree which is planted*, etc. [Ps 1.3]

The tree is the penitent, planted by the running waters of tears, or of abundant grace. His root is humility; his trunk, which stems from it, is obedience; his branches are works of charity extending to both friend and foe. His leaves are the words of eternal life, his fruit is heavenly glory, which has beginning, middle, and end without end. The beginning is the sweetness of contemplation, which the penitent tastes somehow, The middle is rest after the death of the body. The ‘end without end’ is the glorification of the double robe, in eternal blessedness. May he deign to grant us this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, liber Levitici*, 18; PL 198.1205

[2] P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, liber Exodi*, 28; PL 198.1156

[3] The play on words, ‘*puer’* meaning both ‘boy’ and ‘servant’, cannot easily be reproduced.

[4] ROMAN MISSAL, Antiphon at the procession on the feast of the Purification.

[5] Cf. ROMAN BREVIARY, Vesper hymn for the feast of the Holy Name.

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE CHAIR OF SAINT PETER

1. At that time: *Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi*. [Mt16.13]

In this Gospel three things are noted: Jesus Christ's questioning, Peter's confession, and the granting of the power of binding and loosing.

[JESUS CHRIST'S QUESTIONING]

2. Jesus Christ's questioning: *Jesus came*. In this first clause two things are noted morally, holy life and good reputation. But first let us look at the history or allegory.

Caesarea Philippi is where the Jordan rises at the foot of Mount Libanus, and it has two sources, the Jor and the Dan, which when joined together give the Jordan its name*. And he asked his disciples*. To investigate the faith of his disciples, he first asked about popular opinion, in case the faith of the Apostles was based on popular opinion rather than recognition of the truth. *Who do men say* (for those who have various human ideas about the Lord are fittingly termed 'men') *that the Son of man is?* He does not say 'that I am', so as not to seem conceited, but indicated the humility of his humanity. *But they said: Some John the Baptist*, etc. [Mt 16.14]. The opinion concerning John the Baptist was because he had sensed the Lord's presence even in his mother's womb [cf. Lk 1.41,44]; concerning Elias, because he was taken up to heaven [cf. 4(2)Kg 2.11], and was believed to be going to come again [cf. Mt 17.10-11]; concerning Jeremiah, because he was sanctified in his mother's womb [cf. Jer 1.5].

3. *Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi*. Caesarea is 'possession of the prince' or 'principal possession'. Philippi is 'mouth of a lamp'. Christ came; you too, O Christian, should come into the region of Caesarea. A 'prince' is one who holds the first place or dignity, and he represents a man's spirit, whose possession is the body, in which it should take the first place and dignity. Isaiah 32 says:

*The prince will devise such things as are worthy of a prince;*

*and he shall stand above the rulers*. [Is 32.8]

Note the two words, ‘devise’ and ‘stand’. That is the place and dignity the first person should take. What are those things worthy of a prince that you should devise, O prince, spirit of man? Only to return into yourself, enter your own heart, and there take counsel; what you are, what you might have been, what you ought to be, what you could be. What you might have been by nature, what you are by guilt, what you ought to be by effort, what you can still be by grace. The ‘rulers’ are the affections and thoughts which he should stand over, so that he may control his affections and command his thoughts, to restrain the former from unlawful desires, and the latter from vain wandering. *He came into the region*, referring to the bodily senses; a man’s spirit comes to or enters them when *he says to one: Go, and he goes; and to another: Come, and he comes; and to his servant* the body: *Do this, and he does it*. [cf. Mt 8.9].

And note that this prince, whose possession it is, is called ‘mouth of a lamp’. A lamp has four constituents: the clear glass, the nourishing oil, the wick and the flame. The glass represents a pure conscience, the oil compassion for our brother’s need, the wick the roughness of contrition, and the flame the ardour of divine love. Happy that spirit, blessed that Christian, who is the mouth of this lamp! When he speaks, he speaks from purity, compassion, contrition and the love of God.

And note that Caesarea (our flesh) must be situated at the foot of Libanus, where the Jordan rises. Mount Libanus (meaning ‘whiteness’) is the excellence of chastity, whose root is humility, and from which rise two streams. They are the Jor (‘stream’) and the Dan (‘judgement’); and when they mingle they make the Jordan, (‘stream of judgement’), the compunction of tears with which he judges himself and condemns his evil deeds. See how great is the virtue of humility, from which the mountain of chastity arises, and the stream of compunction flows! He who comes in this way to the region of Caesarea Philippi may well ask his disciples, *Who do men say that the Son of man is?*

4. A ‘disciple’ is one who learns discipline. He who is good in himself has, and should have, a well disciplined and well behaved family; so as to say with David:

*My eyes were on the faithful of the earth, to sit with me*, etc. [Ps 100.6]

As a man is himself, so is the company he delights in. Because only a heartless man is indifferent to his reputation, he asks what people say about him, to find out and if needs be amend what needs correction. And because conceit can come from a reputation for holiness of life, and a good name, he calls himself ‘son of man’. Job says:

*A man of rottenness, the son of a man who is a worm.* [Job 25.6]

This is as if to say, rottenness comes from rottenness. God, when he showed Ezekiel great wonders, called him ‘son of man’, so that he should not become proud [cf. Ezek, passim]. He who regards himself as a worm will not be proud of anything about himself. He asks, then, what do men say about a rotten worm like me?

If only they would reply, *Some say John the Baptist.* John the Evangelist and John the Baptist: one had the duty of announcing, the other of washing. The one is good, the other safer, because truth is more safely listened to than preached. Again, an 'evangelist' is one who speaks only with words; a 'baptist' is one who makes within himself a baptistery of tears for himself, in silence and devotion of mind. The latter is far better than the former. Of such a one is said what was said of the Baptist: *he shall drink no wine or strong drink* [Lk 1.15]. He does not drink the wine of vainglory, nor the strong drink of foolish joy, because he does not seek the praises of men.

Or: *Others Elias*; IV Kings 1 says that he was *a hairy man with a girdle of leather about his loins*. [4(2)Kg 1.8]. Behold the vesture of a penitent who despises the world and afflicts his flesh! Elias means 'strong ruler', and III Kings 18 tells of him that

*he took the prophets of Baal and brought them to the torrent Cison, and killed them there*. [3(1)Kg 18.40]

Cison means 'a man spewing sorrow'. Elias, the penitent who is hairy as against the world's glory, is girded about the loins against the lust of the flesh. Like a strong ruler, he takes the prophets of the belly, which consume everything. The belly has its 'prophets', who ask a man, Why are you fasting? Why do you afflict yourself? You will make yourself ill; you will grow so weak that you cannot help yourself or others. Of these, Jeremiah says in Lamentations 2:

*Thy prophets have seen false things for thee.* [Lam 2.14]

The penitent takes hold of them in contrition, and leads them to tearful confession, where he spews up all the sorrow of temptation and sin, and so kills them there.

*Others, Jeremiah*. The Lord said to him,

*Behold, I have set thee*

*To root up* what has been planted badly;

*And to destroy* what has been built badly;

*And to scatter* what has been gathered badly;

*And to lay waste* the hedge;

*And to build* the house;

*And to plant* the garden. [Jer 1.10]

The concupiscence of the flesh plants badly, as Deuteronomy says:

*Thou shalt plant no grove near the altar of thy God.* [cf. Dt 16.21]

The Apostle says of this altar: *We have an altar whereof they have no power to eat who serve the tabernacle* (of the body) [cf. Heb 13.10]. It says in III Kings 21:

*Achab spoke to Naboth, saying:*

*Give me thy vineyard, that I may make me a garden of herbs*. [3(1)Kg 21.2]

Achab is the devil, Naboth the just man, the vine compunction, and the garden of herbs the concupiscence of gluttony and lust. The devil wants to take away compunction of mind from the just man, and plant concupiscence of the flesh.

Again, pride builds badly. Proverbs 17 says:

*He that maketh his house high seeketh a downfall.* [Prov 17.16]

Avarice gathers badly. Habbakuk 2 says:

*Woe to him that gathereth together an evil covetousness to his house,*

*that his nest may be on high,*

*and thinketh that he may be delivered out of the hand of evil*. [Hab 2.9]

The miser gathers so as to build his nest on high, where he and his possessions may stand. But when he thinks he is standing firmly, the devils sets a snare there, and captures parent and chicks, the usurer and his children, and kills them.

Obstinacy makes a hedge; so Nahum 3 says:

*Thy little ones are like the locusts of locusts*

*which swarm on the hedges in the day of cold*. [Nah 3.17]

The locusts are usurers who teach their children the business of usury, and as it were jump from usury to usury. In the cold of their malice, they trust in the hedges of obstinacy; they will neither make restitution to others, nor turn back to repentance.

Truly he is Jeremiah ('lifted to the Lord') who uproots these four not only in himself but in others, and builds a house of humility in which God may rest, and plants a garden of

charity in which he may feed. In Luke 19 the Lord says of the house of humility:

*Zacheus, make haste and come down; for this day I must abide in thy house*. [Lk 19.5]

The grace of the Almighty abides in the house of one who 'comes down', that is, in the conscience of one who humbles himself. Regarding the garden of charity, the Bride says in Canticles 5:

*Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat the fruit of his apple trees*. [Cant 5.1]

Both the garden and the apple trees belong to the beloved, because whatever is planted and grows there is entirely from the grace of Christ. The apples are the works of charity, which Christ eats as often as our neighbour receives them. He says, *I was hungry, and you gave me to eat* [Mt 25.35].

*Or one of the prophets*. A prophet's task is to foretell the future. A good prophet is he who tells himself of his life's end, the coming of the judge and the reward of the heavenly kingdom. Happy is he whose reputation is so praised, whose life is given such a testimonial that he is called a John the Baptist in devotion, an Elias in mortifying the flesh, a Jeremiah in rooting up vices and planting virtues, and one of the prophets in foretelling the future.

[PETER'S CONFESSION]

5. Peter's confession: *Jesus saith to them: But who do you say that I am?* [Mt 16.15]

It is as if he said, "Those are men, with human opinions; you are gods- who do you say I am?"

*Peter answered and said: Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God*. [Mt 16.16]

He answered on behalf of all, for they all knew the same thing. In this confession, the human and the divine nature are united. Christ (from 'chrism') means 'anointed'; because in his manhood he was anointed by God the Father with the Holy Spirit. O *God* the Son, *God thy* Father *hath anointed thee* [Ps 44.8]. So Isaiah 45 says:

*Thus saith the Lord to my anointed Cyrus,* [Is 45.1]

which means 'heir' or 'son'. Whose? The living God's. Note that chrism is made from balsam.

Natural History says that the place where balsam grows is called 'the sun's eye', and its stalk is called a vine, because it resembles a vine. Its juice is used to wash patches from the eyes, and it alleviates bouts of fever. When its juice is being obtained, only the bark

is cut, from which a drop of exceeding sweetness flows. Christ's generation is twofold, that of his divinity and that of his humanity, and each is 'the eye of the sun'. Of the first, Isaiah 53 says:

*Who shall declare his generation?* [Is 53.8]

And Job 28 says:

*Whence cometh wisdom? And where is the place of understanding?*

*It is hid from the eyes of all the living; and the fowls of the air know it not*. [Job 28.20-21]

That is, the generation of Christ from the Father is unknown even to the angels. So Ecclesiasticus 1 says:

*To whom hath the root of wisdom been revealed?* [Ecclus 1.6]

This means the origin of the Son of God. And so, what man can tell what is beyond the understanding and knowledge of the angels? Isidore[1] says: "It is obvious that only the Father knows how he begets the Son, and the Son how he is begotten by the Father. Christ proceeds from the Father like radiance from a source of light, like a word from a mouth, like wisdom from the heart." The generation of the divinity is called 'eye of the sun' because it enlightens the whole Church Triumphant, the heavenly Jerusalem. So Apocalypse 21 says:

*The glory of the Lord hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof*. [Apoc 21.23]

The generation of the humanity is called 'eye of the sun' because by the faith of his incarnation he enlightens the whole Church Militant. So Zechariah 9 says:

*The Lord is the eye of man and of all the tribes of Israel*. [Zech 9.1]

Israel means 'the man who sees God'. You will see just as much as you believe. *He was the true light, which enlighteneth every man* (in the sense that no-one is enlightened without him) *that cometh into this world*. [Jn 1.9]. That is, every man who is born into this world is only enlightened for eternal life by the faith of Christ, who says in John 15: *I am the true vine* [Jn 15.1].

6. A vine has the power to root itself swiftly, twining itself around. Natural History says that the vine has many shoots, with which it binds itself and entwines itself to the branches of another tree. The characteristic of a vine, among all other trees, is to put out leaves on one side, in one knot of its branch; and on the other side a cluster full of grapes. And it is characteristic of a vine that if cabbages are planted at its root, they cause it to wither. The vine is the faith of Christ, which has the power to root itself swiftly

in the human heart. The Apostle says, *rooted and founded in Christ Jesus*, etc. [cf. Eph 3.17]. It puts out branches of charity, and binds others to itself. On one side it has the leaves of preaching, on the other clusters of good works, full of the new wine of delight. Cabbages, temporal cares or carnal impulses, dry up its sap, the devotion of faith.

Again, the balsam vine is cut in its bark. The 'bark' is Christ's humanity, from whose wounds flows a liquid of wonderful sweetness, the precious blood which washes the patch of infidelity from the eye of the heart, and takes away the fever of temptation; for "The remembrance of the Crucified crucifies vices."[2] *Thou art the Christ*, then, *the Son of the Living God*.

*Jesus, answering, said to him* (in Peter answering them all): *Blessed art thou, Simon bar Jona*, etc. [Mt 16.17]. Bar means 'son', and Jona is 'dove'. Peter is well called 'son of a dove', because he followed the Lord with devout simplicity, or because he was full of spiritual grace. He is called son of the Holy Spirit, who was shown in the form of a dove by him whom he called 'Son of the Living God'; The Father revealed to the 'son of the dove' the mystery of faith which flesh and blood could not reveal, those men who are puffed up with carnal wisdom, who are not 'sons of the dove' and therefore strangers to the spirit of wisdom. Obadiah 1 says of them:

*I shall destroy the wise out of Edom, and understanding out of the mount of Esau*. [Ob 1.8]

Behold flesh and blood: Edom means 'bloody', and Esau is 'heap of stones'. The whole wisdom and prudence of this world is to nourish the flesh, and make a heap of stones (money) with which they will be stoned in the day of judgement.

[THE GRANTING OF THE POWER OF BINDING AND LOOSING]

7. The granting of the power of binding and loosing: *And I say to thee that thou art Peter* [Mt 16.18]. Note that Peter has three names: Simon (meaning 'obedient'), Peter ('recognising') and Cephas ('head'). He was 'Simon' in Christ's calling: *Come ye after me; and they, leaving their nets*, etc. [Mt 4.19-20]. He was 'Peter' in today's confession, by which he recognised Christ as the Son of the Living God, and so merited to hear: *Thou art Peter*. I say not that you will be called, but that you are Peter, from me the rock, yet in such wise that I retain for myself the dignity of being the foundation stone. For indeed, *Other foundation no man can lay, but that which is laid; which is Christ Jesus* [1Cor 3.11], upon whom the Church is built.

*And upon this rock I will build my Church* [Mt 16.18]; and so there need be no fear, whether the rain of the devil's persecution falls, or the floods of heretical distortion comes, or the winds of worldly rage blow and beat upon that house; because it is founded upon a rock.[cf. Mt 7.25]. Thus in Numbers 24 it says:

*Thy habitation indeed is strong: but though thou build thy nest in a rock,*

*thou shalt be chosen of the stock of Cain*, [Num 24.21-22]

meaning crafty or hot, the devil who by his craftiness inflames the souls of sinners with the heat of vices; they will have him as their tormentor in pain, who was their tempter to blame.

*I will build my Church*, he says. Note that ‘Church’ may mean both the triumphant and the militant Church, and the faithful soul. He builds the first of blessed spirits, the second of the faithful, and the third with virtues. Thus he is called a ‘mason’, as in Amos 7:

*Behold, the Lord was standing upon a plastered wall,*

*and in his hand a mason’s trowel*. [Am 7.7]

A trowel joins stones together with cement, and also plasters walls. A ‘plastered wall’ is one that has been smoothed in this way. The trowel is God’s power, which builds the wall of the three-fold Church, and smoothes it so that there is nothing rough, no holes or bumps, but it is entirely flat and smooth. The Apostle says: *Let all things be done in charity* [1Cor 16.14], the cement of the other virtues. And note that the Lord stands upon the wall of the Church for three reasons: to build the wall itself; to fight enemies from it, and for it; and to protect it.

And so, *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* [Mt 16.18]. The gates of hell are sins, threats or flatteries, which cannot prevail; that is, they cannot separate the Church from the faith and charity which are in Christ Jesus. He who holds the faith of Christ in the inmost love of his heart will easily overcome what attacks him from outside. Alternatively, gates are the portals through which things are exported, and hell is the place into which souls are carried. The gates of hell are the bodily senses through which the sinful soul is carried out, to seek the things below. So Isaiah 22 says:

*Behold, the Lord will cause thee to be carried away, as a cock is carried away*. [Is 22.17]

As the crafty fox carries off the cock, through his greed, to his den, so the false concupiscence of the flesh carries of the soul through the bodily senses, to those lower things. But if it were built upon the love of Christ, they would not be able to prevail against it.

8. There follows: *And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven* [Mt 16.19]. Behold Cephas, set at the head of the Apostles and of the Church. It is told that today Christ questioned the Apostles, and Peter confessed the faith of the universal Church on behalf of them all. Today, too, the Lord granted him the power of binding and loosing, and that is why this day is called "The Chair of St Peter". He who confessed before the rest, is given the keys before the rest. So there is added, *Whatsoever thou shalt bind*; that is, whoever, persisting in sin, you judge worthy of eternal punishment, or who ever

you absolve as a humble and true penitent: so will it be in heaven. St Jerome's Gloss says: "*And whatsoever thou shalt bind*: the other Apostles indeed have the same power of judging, because after the Resurrection the Lord said to them: *Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained* [Jn 20.23]; the whole Church has this power in its priests and bishops. Yet Peter received it in a special way, so that all might understand that whoever should separate themselves from the unity of faith and his company, can neither be absolved from sin nor enter heaven. Some do not understand this text, and partake somewhat of the Pharisees arrogance, thinking that they can damn the innocent and free the guilty; but before God it will not be the sentence of priests, but the life of the guilty, which will be asked about. In Leviticus, lepers were commanded to show themselves to the priests [cf. Lev 14.2], but these did not make them lepers; they only discerned who was clean or unclean; and so it is here."

By the prayers of blessed Peter, then, may the Lord who is blessed for ever loose us from the bonds of sin, and open to us the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

9. *David, sitting in the chair was the wisest chief among the three:*

*he was like the most tender little worm of the wood*. [2Kg(Sm) 23.8]

In this text, from II Kings 23, David (meaning 'strong in the arm') is Simon Peter, to whom Jesus Christ gave the name Peter after himself, the Rock. When he put forth his hand and left everything, he was strong-armed. The miser has a weak hand, clenched and withered. So Matthew 12 says:

*And behold there was a man with a withered hand*. [Mt 12.10]

The Lord said to him:

*Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored to health*. [Mt 12.13]

The Gloss says, "There is no more effective cure than generosity in almsgiving; for he vainly stretches out his hands to God, asking for his sins, if he will not extend them as far as he can to the poor." Peter, then, *sitting in the chair was the wisest*. Acts 4 says:

*Seeing the constancy of Peter and John, understanding that they were illiterate and ignorant men, they wondered; and they knew them that they had been with Jesus*. [Ac 4.13]

No wonder if the uneducated Peter is called 'wisest', because he had been with Jesus the Wisdom of the Father, he had loved him more than the others, and he had learnt in

his school the wisdom of heaven, not of the world. *He that walketh with the wise, shall be wise* [cf. Prov 13.20]. Peter was not that learned man of whom Isaiah 23 says:

*Where is the learned? Where is he that pondereth the words of the law?*

*Where is the teacher of little ones?* [Is 33.18]

and of whom the Apostle says:

*Thou teachest another, but teachest not thyself; thou makest thy boast in the law, but by transgression of the law dishonourest God*. [Rom 2.21,23]

Peter was 'uneducated' on earth, but 'wisest' in heaven. whose keys he received today, and sat upon his 'chair', the judicial power of binding and loosing. He also sat upon a material chair, at Antioch and at Rome, where his chair is shown today to the people.

*Chief among the three*. The three among whom the Prince of the Apostles sat on his chair, were his three fold constancy of faith. The first was in today's confession: *Thou art the Christ*, etc. The second was in his preaching: *We ought to obey God rather than men* [Ac 5.29]. The third was in his Passion.

*He was like the most tender little worm of the wood*. Note that there is nothing softer than a worm when you touch it, nothing stronger when it bites. It was the same with Peter. No-one was milder, or more patient, when he was scourged and crucified. He taught his disciples, in his first Epistle, ch. 3:

*Modest, humble, not rendering evil for evil, nor railing for railing*, etc. [1Pt 3.8-9]

When he 'bit', no-one was stronger. He said to Ananias:

*Why hath Satan tempted thy heart, that thou shouldst lie to the Holy Ghost and by fraud keep the price of the land? Thou hast not lied to men, but to God. And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and gave up the ghost*. [Ac 5.3-5]

And he told Simon Magus:

*Keep thy money to thyself, to perish with thee*. [Ac 8.20]

May he who gave Peter the power to bind and loose deliver us from this! Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

10. *David, sitting in the chair*. There is something similar in Ecclesiasticus:

*The king, that sitteth on the throne of judgement,*

*scattereth away all evil with his look*. [Prov 20.8]

David, the just man or the penitent, is strong-armed. So Genesis 16 says of Ismael:

*He shall be a wild man.*

*His hand will be against all men, and all men's hands against him;*

*and he shall pitch his tents over against all his brethren*. [Gen 16.12]

Where we have 'wild man', the Hebrew says 'wild ass'. This represents the penitent, who 'bears the burden of the day and the heats' [cf. Mt 20.12] in the field of penitence. His 'hand' (his works) is against all the demons, and the 'hands' of all the demons are against him. "An enemy who fights well makes you a good fighter"[3] He firmly pitches the tents of penitence against his 'brethren', his impulses or bodily senses, being ready to withstand them at all times.

And where does this strength come to him from? Surely from the 'chair'. *Sitting in the chair he was the wisest*. Wisdom is of things that are, and those who belong to it are allotted its unchangeable substance. Wisdom is as it were a 'taste'; just as taste distinguishes the flavour of foods, so the wise man distinguishes wise and unwise, evil and good. The penitent or the just man is wise in lamenting past misdeeds, wiser in avoiding pitfalls, and wisest of all in savouring eternal goods. He sits in the chair. The 'chair', the high seat of a judge, is the reason, also called a 'throne', being firmly established. He who sits in it dispels with a look all the evil of the devil, the flesh and the world. "The reason is that aspect of the mind whereby it sees the truth, in virtue of itself, not of the body; or, it is the very contemplation of truth, not by the body; or it is the very truth which is contemplated."[4]

Alternatively, the 'chair' is the remembrance of death, in which one sits by humbling oneself. No one can steer his boat properly, unless he takes care to sit in the stern. The 'boat', narrow at the front and the rear, but wide in the middle, is human life, which is narrow indeed at its entrance and exit, which are wretched and bitter, but wide in the middle, wandering and wanton. No one can steer it properly unless he takes care to humble himself in the remembrance of death. And note that it says 'wisest'. The steersman who sits in the stern, the rearmost part of the ship, is, and must be, the wisest of all. He sees everyone, watches over everything, stirs up the lazy, encourages those who labour, promises a lull in the storm- indeed, calm- and cheers them up with the hope of a good harbour. In this way, he who humbles himself in the remembrance of death arranges his whole life properly, and supervise its circumstances. He knows well how to eradicate idleness, strengthen himself in labour, hope in the Lord's mercy in time of adversity, and direct his life to the harbour of eternal life.

11. And so, he is *wisest chief among the three*, meaning contrition, confession and satisfaction. I Kings 10 tells of these three, when Samuel says to Saul:

*When thou shalt come to the oak of Thabor, there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine*. [1Kg(Sm) 10.3]

Let us see what is meant by the oak of Thabor, the three men, Bethel, the three kids and three loaves of bread, and the bottle of wine.

The oak is a tree from which anciently folk used to seek food, the acorns which at first men made use of. Thabor means ‘coming light’. The oak is penitence, in which the ancient fathers used to seek food for the soul, the coming light of divine grace. The heavenly light came there, showing a man himself and what belonged to him, which he did not see before. When, therefore, you come to penitence, there shall meet you three men going up (making you go up) to God at Bethel (meaning ‘house of God’, the heavenly Jerusalem). Contrition carries three kids, which stand for the three-fold stink of sin, in conscience, person and reputation. The penitent must weep in contrition, because he has corrupted his conscience by consent, his person by his action, and his reputation by bad example.

Again, confession carries three loaves of bread, representing three kinds of tears. As it is said, *My tears have been my bread day and night* [Ps 41.4]. Tears are well called ‘loaves’, which come by kneading the heart. Tears come by ‘tearing’ the mind. ‘Bread’ is a word used to stand for any sort of food, which any animal seeks. We must season every food of our soul with compunction, because every work is flavourless without devotion. We seek it, and must seek it, every day from God, because we need it every day: *Give us this day our daily bread*, etc. [Lk 11.3]. So the sinner must weep in confession, because he has soiled the robe of his Baptismal innocence, earned Hell instead, and lost eternal life.

Again, satisfaction carries a bottle of wine, representing the gladness of satisfaction, which should not be performed half-heartedly or grudgingly. *The Lord loveth a cheerful giver* [2Cor 9.7]. Fasting and almsgiving should be performed gladly, and prayer with hope in the divine mercy. Happy is that penitent, ruler of himself, sitting in the seat of reason, or humbling himself in the remembrance of death, who is thus amongst these three.

12. There follows: *He was like the most tender little worm of the wood*. Note that a worm has three characteristics. It is always in motion, it lifts its head to see the way it may best go, and it shortens itself so as to stretch itself out longer. So, too, the just man: He is always at work. St Jerome says, "Always be doing some work, so that the devil finds you busy," because, *Idleness hath taught much evil* [Ecclus 33.29].

"If you ask why Aegisthus became an adulterer,

the answer is: he had nothing better to do."[6]

Natural History teaches that from idleness superfluities grow in the body. It is the same with the soul. But hard work consumes these superfluities, so that they evaporate from those who do much. It is also said that all species of plant, if not cultivated, will run wild. Again, he raises his head (his mind) so as to see with the eye of discretion the way of his action, whereby he may better draw himself to God. It is said that: *The eyes of a wise man are in his head* [Eccles 2.14], meaning the light of discretion in his mind. And also: *Let thy eyelids go before thy steps* [Prov 4.25]. Again, he shortens himself by humility, so as to stretch himself out towards eternal life. May he who is blessed for ever deign to grant us this. Amen.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

13. *David, sitting in the chair*. David, whose name means 'beautiful to see', is Christ, who did battle against the powers of the air, with his hands nailed to the cross, on whose beautiful countenance the angels desire to gaze [cf. 1Pt 1.12]. For, as Apocalypse 1 says:

*His face was as the sun shineth in his power*. [Apoc 1.16]

He *sits in the chair* (that is, the Cross), *the wisest*, because he is the Wisdom of God the Father in which he made all things. There is something similar in III Kings 4:

*Solomon was wiser than all men; and he treated about trees, from the cedar that is in Libanus, unto the hyssop that cometh out of the wall*. [3(1)Kg 4.31,33]

Solomon is Christ, wiser than all men because he is Wisdom itself; of which Ecclesiasticus 1 says:

*Who hath searched out the wisdom of God that goeth before all things?*

*Wisdom hath been created before all things.*

*The word of God on high is the fountain of wisdom,* [Ecclus 1.3-5]

meaning the Son from whom all wisdom is derived, like water from a fountain.

He, sitting upon the wood of the Cross, treated from the cedar of Libanus (the height of the divinity), to the hyssop (the lowliness of his humanity) which grows out of the wall, the blessed Virgin, of whom Isaiah 38 says:

*Ezechias turned his face to the wall, and wept with a great weeping*. [Is 38.2-3]

The promise was made to David, that of his seed Christ would be born; but when Ezechias saw that he was going to die without an heir, he believed that the promise regarding Christ was going to fail. So he *wept with a great weeping*, and *turned his face* (the gaze of his mind) *towards the wall*, the blessed Virgin, whom above all he desired to be born of his seed, so that from her Christ might be born. Great was the wisdom of Christ upon the Cross, which caught the devil with the hook of the divinity, when he tried to swallow the bait of his humanity. So Job 26 says:

*His wisdom hath struck the proud one*. [Job 26.12]

14. He sits, therefore, *in the chair, wisest chief among the three*. Understand this as follows, that he himself was one among three, Dismas and Gestas, and the divine power in the middle. So John says:

*They crucified him with two others, one on each side, and Jesus in the middle*. [Jn 19.18]

See how he sits, how the prince of angels humbles himself! As if he were a thief, he is crucified between thieves. And so, regarding his humility, the text continues: *He was like the most tender little worm of the wood.*

Note that a worm does three things: it draws itself along with its mouth; it cries loudly when the wood it is in is burnt; it is soft to the touch, but hard when it bites. So Christ, when confronting the malice of the Jews, drew himself to the Cross by his own mouth. "Truth gives birth to hatred."[7] That is why he bore the Cross. It is also written of him that "The scarab cries from the Cross."[8] The scarab is a little flying animal whose eyes are on top of its head. So Christ was ‘little’ by his humility, and ‘flying’ by the power of his divinity, for:

*He flew upon the wings of the winds’,* [Ps 17.11],

that is, upon the virtues of the angels and saints. *The head of Christ is God* [1Cor 11.3]. He has eyes on top of his head, because he sees all from the power of his divinity, *in whose sight no creature is invisible* [cf. Heb 4.13]. When he was burning on the wood of the Cross with the fire of the Passion, he cried with a loud voice: *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit* [Lk 23.46]. Again, no-one was more patient or humble than he, when he was scourged, crowned with thorns, buffeted with blows. No-one will be stronger than he, when in the judgement, by an irrevocable sentence, he casts the devil with all his members into hell. May he, who is blessed for ever, deliver us from this! Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

15. *David, sitting in the chair*, etc. David, whose name means ‘merciful’, is any prelate of

the Church who is chosen for this: to show mercy to others with a three-fold mercy. So "Peter was told three times, *Feed* [cf. Jn 21.15-17]; he was not once told, Shear! Feed with the word of preaching, with the suffrage of devout prayer, and with temporal benefits."[9] He sits in the chair of ecclesiastical dignity, and would that he were 'wisest' by that wisdom of which James 3 says:

*The wisdom that is from above, first indeed is chaste, then peaceable, modest, easy to be persuaded, consenting to the good, full of mercy and good fruits, judging, without dissimulation*. [Jas 3.17]

Behold the seven steps by which the prelate should go up to his chair: Ezekiel says, *Its ascent was by seven steps* [cf. Ezek 40.22]. The prelate's life should be seasoned with the wisdom which is from above, so that in the first place the purity of his mind should be chaste as to himself, and peaceful towards his neighbour. He should be modest, as to his moral behaviour; persuadable and ready to listen; consenting to what is good, both in inclination and in action; and full of mercy. Behold David, merciful towards the poor, to whom belonged all he had beyond his personal needs; otherwise, 'the spoil of the poor would be in his house' [cf. Is 3.14], and he should be reckoned a robber. Alternatively, he is full of mercy in the compassion of his mind, and fruitful in carrying out his work. He judges without pretence, having no favourites in his judgement; or else, he metes out to himself the same measure of penance as he judges for others, because:

*Diverse weights and diverse measures, both are abominable before God*. [Prov 20.10]

And:

*A scant measure is full of wrath*. [Mic 6.10]

There follows: *chief among the three*. These are way of life, knowledge and eloquence, which should be the chief supports of a prelate. His life should be pure, his knowledge sound, and his eloquence to the point. But alas! Nowadays we see uncleanness in life, blindness in knowledge and dumbness in eloquence. *He was like the most tender little worm of the wood*. The Gloss says, "David was milder than others in his troubles, in his household and regarding his subjects. But upon his throne, and against his enemies, no-one was sharper." And David is commended here for these three, namely his wisdom, his humility and his fortitude. Such should be the prelate who wants to rule the people committed to him well. May he who is blessed for ever deign to grant him this. Amen.

NOTES

[1] ISIDORE, *De fide catholica*, I,2,5; PL 83.453-454

[2] Abbot GUERRIC, Sermon for Palm Sunday, 2,1; PL 185.130

[3] OVID, *Ponticae* II,3,53

[4] GUIGO THE CARTHUSIAN, *Epistola ad fratres*, II,2,4: PL 184.341

[5] JEROME, *Letter 125 to Rusticus*, 11; PL 22.1078

[6] OVID, *Remedia amoris*, 161-162

[7] TERENCE, I,1,41

[8] cf. AMBROSE, *Expositio in Lucam*, X,113; PL 14.1925

[9] cf. Abbot GAUFRIDUS, *Declamationes*, 11,12; PL 184.444

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE BEGINNING OF THE FAST

1. At that time, *Jesus said to his disciples: When you fast*, etc. [Mt 6.16]

In this Gospel two things are noted: fasting and almsgiving.

[FASTING]

2. Fasting: *When you fast*. In this first clause four things are noted, namely, the pretence of the hypocrites, the anointing of the head, the washing of the face and the hiding of good deeds.

*When you fast*. Natural History says that the saliva of a man who is fasting has power against poisonous animals; and so, if a serpent tastes it, it dies. There is, then, great medicinal power in a fasting man. As long as Adam in Paradise abstained from the forbidden tree, he remained innocent. See the medicine which kills the serpent-devil, and restores the paradise which was lost by greed! It is told that Esther humbled her body with fasts, to put down the proud Aman and restore the grace of king Assuerus to the Jews [cf. Esth 4]. Fast, then, if you want these two things, namely, victory over the devil and restoration of lost grace.

But, *When you fast, be not as the hypocrites, sad* [Mt 6.16]; that is, make a display of your fasting by the very sadness of your face. It is not the virtue which is forbidden, but the pretence of virtue. The hypocrite is ‘gilt’ on the outside, but ‘clay’ in his inner conscience. He is like the Babylonian idol of Bel, of which Daniel 14 says:

*O king, be not deceived, for this is but clay within, and brass without.* [Dan 14.6]

Brass makes a ringing sound, while having something of the appearance of gold. Likewise the hypocrite loves the ringing of praise, and shows the appearance of holiness. The hypocrite is humble in face, lowly in dress, an exile in voice, but a wolf in mind. This sadness is not ‘according to God’. It’s a wonderful way to get praise, to pretend to signs of sadness! Usually men rejoice in monetary gain; this is a different business- that is vanity, but this is falsity!

*They disfigure their faces* [Mt 6.16], beyond the limits of the normal human condition. Excess in dirty and ragged clothing is as much a form of boasting as too much splendour. One should keep to the mean between an affectation of filth and a fussiness about cleanliness. *That they may appear unto men.* Whatever they do is just outward show, painted in false colours. The Gloss says, "To seem different from other men, they make display of a lowness beyond other men." *Fasting*: The hypocrite fasts to gain praise, the miser to fill his purse; but the just man to please God*. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward* [Mt 6.16]. This is the reward of prostitution, of which Moses says: *Make not thy daughter a prostitute* [Lev 19.29]. Their 'daughter' is their deeds, which they send into the world's brothel to gain the reward of praise. He would be a fool, who exchanged a gold mark for a lead penny. He who gives the good he does for human praise, is selling something of great value for a cheap price.

3. *But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face.* [Mt 6.17]

There is a **concordance** in Zechariah 8:

*Thus saith the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Juda joy and gladness and great solemnities*. [Zech 8.19]

Penitents are the house of Juda ('confessing' or 'praising'), for their confession of sin is the praise of God. To them belongs the 'fast of the fourth', because they fast from four things: the pride of the devil, impurity of the mind, the glory of the world, and injury to their neighbour. *This is the fast that I have chosen, saith the Lord* [cf. Is 58.6]. The 'fast of the fifth' is restraining the five senses from wandering and wantonness. The 'fast of the seventh' is the exclusion of earthly cupidity. Just as the seventh day is said to have no end, so the greed for money is bottomless and insatiable. The 'fast of the tenth' is the cessation from an evil end, for ten is the end of all number- whoever wants to count beyond ten, must go back to one again. The Lord complains in Malachi 3:

*You afflict me, and you have said: Wherein do we afflict thee?*

*In tithes and in first-fruits*. [Mal 3.8]

That is, in an evil end and in the beginning of a corrupt intention. Take heed: he mentions 'tithes' before 'first-fruits', because it is chiefly from a corrupt end that all the preceding work is made blameworthy. Such a fast is, for penitents, in joy of mind and in gladness of divine love, and in the great solemnities of heavenly conversation. This is 'to anoint the head and wash the face'. He anoints his head, who is inwardly rich in spiritual joy; he washes his face, who adorns his works with honesty of life.

4. Alternatively: *But thou, when thou fastest*. There are many who fast throughout these forty days, and yet persist in their sins. These do not anoint their heads. Note that there are three kinds of ointment: that which soothes, that which corrodes, and that which

stings. The first is made of the remembrance of death, the second of the presence of the coming Judge, the third of Gehenna. A head may be blistered, or full of warts, or covered in a rash. A blister is weeping sore in the skin; a wart is an excrescence of the flesh, an excess; a rash is a dry scabbiness, which is unsightly. These three represent pride, avarice and inveterate lust. Do you, O proud man, bring back before your mind's eye the reduction of your body to ashes, decay and stink. Where then will be your pride of heart, your boasted riches? Windy words will then cease, just as a blister bursts at the prick of the needle. When these things are thought about inwardly, they anoint the blistered head; that is, they humble the proud mind.

And do you, O miser, remember the last assize, where there is the angry judge, the executioner ready to torture, the accusing demons, the gnawing conscience. Then, as Ezekiel says, *thy silver shall be cast forth and thy gold shall become a dunghill. Thy silver and thy gold shall not be able to deliver thee in the day of the wrath of the Lord* [cf. Ezek 7.19]. When these things are carefully considered, they corrode and cut out the warty superfluities, and share them among those who have not even the necessities of life. Do you, I pray, when you fast, anoint your head with this ointment, so that what you take from yourself you may bestow on the poor.

And do you, O lustful man, remember the unquenchable Gehenna, where there is undying death, an endless end; where death is sought and not found, where the damned gnaw their own tongues and curse their Creator.. The wood for this fire consists in the souls of sinners, and the breath of God's anger makes it blaze. So Isaiah 30 says:

*For Topheth* (Gehenna)

*is prepared from yesterday* (from eternity, which is but yesterday to God),

*deep and wide. The nourishment thereof is fire and much wood;*

*the breath of the Lord as a torrent of brimstone kindling it*. [Is 30.33]

Behold the stinging ointment which heals the inveterate lust of the mind. Just as a key is pushed out by a key, so these (when pondered carefully) drive out the sting of lust. Do you, when you fast, anoint your head with this ointment.

5. There follows: *Wash thy face*. When women want to go out in public, they set a mirror before themselves, and if they notice any spot on their face, they wash it with water. You should do likewise. Look into the mirror of your own conscience, and if you find their any spot of sin, go at once to the fountain of confession. When the face of your body is washed in confession with tears, the face of your soul is made bright. Note, then, that tears are clear against obscurity, warm against coldness, and salt against the stink of sin. *That thou appear not to men to fast.* He fasts to men, who seeks their favour; he fasts to God, who for love of him torments himself and bestows on others what he takes from himself. *But to thy Father who is in secret* [Mt 6.18]. The Gloss says, "Your Father

is within by faith, and he rewards what is done in secret. Fast, then, where he may see. The faster must needs fast so as to please him whom he bears in his breast."

[ALMSGIVING]

6. Almsgiving: *Lay not up to yourselves treasures*, etc. [Mt 6.19]. Rust eats metal, and moths eat clothes; and what these leave, thieves steal. In these three ways, all avarice is condemned. Let us see what is meant by these five: earth, treasures, rust, moth and thieves.

The ‘earth’, parched with a natural dryness, is the flesh; which so thirsts that it can never be satisfied. The ‘treasures’ are the precious senses of the body. The ‘rust’, harmful to iron and eating it away, is lust which at the same time as dulling the beauty of the soul, also eats it away. The clinging ‘moth’ is pride or wrath. The ‘thieves’, who come in the darkness of night, are the demons. If, then, we do something in the flesh, and heap up treasures on earth (that is, if we occupy the precious bodily senses in earthly or fleshly desires), then the rust of lust will consume them. Further, pride, wrath and other vices destroy the clothing of morals; and if anything is left the demons steal it, being ever intent on despoiling the things of the spirit.

There follows: *Lay up to yourselves treasures* [Mt 6.20]. Alms are a great treasure. St Lawrence said, "The hands of the poor have carried away the goods of the Church as heavenly treasures."[1] He who gives to Christ lays up treasure in heaven. He who succours the poor, gives to Christ: *What you did to the least of mine, you did to me* [cf. Mt 25.40], he says. The Greek ‘*eleemosyna*’ means the same as ‘mercy’. Mercy waters the wretched heart. A man waters his garden, so as to get fruit from it. You should water the heart of the wretched and poor with alms, which are called ‘the water of God’., so that you may gather fruit in eternal life. Let the poor man be your ‘heaven’; place your treasure in him, so that your heart may ever be there, and especially in these forty days. Where your heart is, there your eye is; and where these two are, there is understanding; as it is said:

*Blessed is he that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor.* [Ps 40.2]

Daniel said to Nabuchodonosor:

*Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to thee, and redeem thou thy sins with alms and thy iniquities with works of mercy to the poor*. [Dan 4.24]

There are many sins and iniquities, and so there should be many alms and works of mercy to the poor. With these, redeemed from the captivity of sin, you may return, free men, to your heavenly homeland. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

7. We read in the Judges 7 that Gedeon defeated the camp of Madian with lamps, trumpets and pitchers [cf. Jg 7.16-23]. There is something similar in Isaiah 10:

*Behold, the sovereign Lord of hosts shall break the earthen vessel with terror.*

*And the tall of stature shall be cut down; and the lofty shall be humbled.*

*And the thickets of the forest shall be cut down with iron,*

*and Libanus with its high ones shall fall* [Is 10.33-34]

Let us see what is meant by these four: Gedeon, the lamp, the trumpet and the pitcher.

Gedeon means ‘going round in the womb’, and he stands for the penitent, who before he approaches confession should go round in the womb of his own conscience, in which the son of life or of death is conceived and generated. What was his age, for how many years it has been possible for him to have lived, when first he began to commit mortal sin; and since then how many and great sins, and how frequently, has he committed? How many, and who, were the persons with whom he committed sin? What were the places, times, privately or publicly, freely or under duress, after being tempted or before temptation- and so much the worse. Whether he has confessed all these things, and if so, how often has he fallen again, for then he has been more and more ungrateful to God. Whether he has despised confession, and how long he has remained in sin without confession; and whether he has received the Lord’s Body while in mortal sin.

Of this going round, I Kings 7 says:

*And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.*

*And he went every year about to Bethel and to Galgal and to Masphath.*

*And he returned to Ramatha; for there was his house*. [1Kg(Sm) 7.15-17]

Samuel means ‘hearing God’. Bethel is ‘house of God’, Galgal is ‘hill of circumcision’, Masphath is ‘contemplating the time’ and Ramatha is ‘he sees death’. The penitent, hearing God saying: *Do penance* [Mt 3.2], should judge himself all the days of his life, so that he may be ‘Israel’, ‘the man who sees God’. Year by year, during these forty days, he should go around his own conscience, which is the house of God, and whatever he finds there that is harmful or superfluous, he should cut away in humility of contrition. He should contemplate the time that is past, diligently enquiring what he has done and what he has neglected, and after all this he should always return to the remembrance of death, which he should have before his eyes, and dwell upon.

8. The penitent is a careful surveyor, and when he has completed his round he should at

once light a lamp which ‘burns and shines’ [cf. Jn 5.35], meaning contrition. It is because it burns that it gives light. So Isaiah 10 says:

*The light of Israel shall be as a fire, and the Holy One thereof as a flame. And his thorns and his briers shall be set on fire and shall be devoured in one day. And the glory of his forest and of his beautiful hill shall be consumed from the soul even to the flesh*. [Is 10.17-18]

This is what true contrition does. When the sinner’s heart is set alight by the grace of the Holy Spirit, it burns with sorrow and shines with self-knowledge. Then the thorns of a biting conscience, and the briars of lustful impulses, will be devoured, because peace has returned inwardly and outwardly. *The glory of the forest* (worldly pomp) *and of the beautiful hill* of carnal lust, *shall be consumed from the soul even to the flesh*, because whatever there is impure in either will be wholly consumed in the fire of contrition.

Happy is he whose lamp so burns and shines, of which Job 12 says:

*The lamp, despised in the thoughts of the rich, is ready for the time appointed.* [Job 12.5]

The thoughts of the rich of this world are: to keep what they have gained, and to sweat in gaining more; and therefore seldom or never is true contrition found in them. They despise it, being entirely set on transitory things. While they are set so ardently on the sweetness of temporal things, they forget contrition, the life of the soul, and so incur death.

Natural History says that deer are hunted in this way. Two men go, and one of them whistles and sings. The deer follows the song, taking pleasure in it. Then the other one takes his spear, strikes the deer and kills it. The hunting of the rich is the same. The two men are the world and the devil. The world whistles and sings in front of the rich man, showing him pleasures and riches, and promising him them. While the stupid fool follows, taking pleasure in them, he is killed by the devil and carried of to hell’s kitchen, to be skinned and boiled.

9. But see now, it is the time of Lent, appointed by the Church for redeeming sins and saving souls; the time when the grace of contrition stands ready, which now spiritually ‘stands at the door and knocks’; and if you will open to it and receive it, it will sup with you and you with it [cf. Apoc 3.20]. Then you will wonderfully begin to blow the trumpet! The trumpet is the confession of the contrite sinner, of which Exodus 19 says:

*And all mount Sinai was on a smoke, because the Lord was come down upon it in fire, and the smoke arose from it as out of a furnace. And all the mount was terrible. And the sound of the trumpet grew by degrees louder and louder, and was drawn out to a greater length*. [Ex 19.18-19]

This shows what the sinner should be like in his confession. A mountain has no motion;

Mount Sinai (meaning 'my teeth') is the penitent who is constant in temptation, and who tears the flesh of his carnal nature with the teeth of his reproaches. He totally smokes with tears, which go up from the furnace of contrition resulting from the descent of heavenly grace. *And all the mount was terrible*, being full of tears and grief in the face, vileness in vesture, sorrow in the heart, groans and sighs in the voice. *And the sound of the trumpet* (confession) *grew by degrees louder*, etc.

Note here the manner of confession. Confession should start with self-accusation, how he has gone from temptation to taking pleasure, from pleasure to consent, from consent to words, from words to deeds, from deeds to custom, from custom to settled habit. He should start with lust, and all its modes and circumstances, according to nature and against nature. Secondly, he should go on with avarice, usury, theft and robbery and all ill-gotten gain which he is bound to restore, if he is at all able. If he is a cleric, he should mention simony, and whether he received Orders while excommunicate, or exercised them, or any other irregularity. Thirdly, and for the rest, as seems right to the one confessing or to his confessor, he may confess other things.

10. When he has made his confession, he should be enjoined a satisfaction, represented by the pitcher, or the breaking of the pitcher. The pitcher is broken when the body is afflicted. Madian ('concerning judgement'), or iniquity (the devil who is already damned by God's judgement), is conquered, and its iniquity is brought to nothing. This is what Isaiah says:

*The tall of stature shall be cut down* (meaning the demons);

*and the lofty shall be humbled* (meaning proud men).

*And the thickets of the forest* (temporal abundance)

*shall be cut down with iron* (the fear of God),

*and Libanus* (the gleam of worldly pomp)

*with its high ones shall fall* (its nuts and trifles and illusions). [Is 10.33-34]

Note that satisfaction consists in three things: in prayer to God, in almsgiving to one's neighbour, and in fasting as to oneself; so that the flesh which cheerfully led the way to blame, may when afflicted bring back to pardon. May he deign to grant us this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] ROMAN BREVIARY, Magnificat Antiphon for the feast of St Lawrence.

# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE ANNUNCIATION TO HOLY MARY

1. At that time: *The angel Gabriel was sent by God*. [Lk 1.26]

In this Gospel three things are noted: the sending of Gabriel to the Virgin, the announcement of the Lord's conception, and the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.

[THE SENDING OF GABRIEL TO THE VIRGIN]

2. The sending of Gabriel to the Virgin: *The angel Gabriel was sent*; whose name means 'God is my comfort'. Isaiah says:

*Say to the fainthearted: Take courage, and fear not.*

*Behold, God himself will come and will save you*. [Is 35.4]

We usually comfort three kinds of people especially- the sick, the bereaved and the fearful. Such was the human race: it had laboured in sickness for five thousand years, and found no remedy. It was bereft of the delights of Paradise. It was in continual fear of the devil, who scourged it with one hand, and dragged it to hell with the other. But thanks be to God! Comfort was sent, which healed the sick, consoled the lonely, and made the fearful safe. *The angel Gabriel was sent* [Lk 1.26], then, a good ambassador from a far-off land, bringing cool water to the thirsty soul. Behold the comfort of the thirsty soul, faint from thirst, and falling through faintness- cool water, the water of saving wisdom.

Whither was he sent? *Into a city of Galilee*, which means 'a wheel' or 'passing across'. Those who labour in these two, need comfort. A wheel runs- to ruin! The human race ran from sin to sin, and afterwards passed over to hell. So Jeremiah says in Lamentations 1:

*Juda hath removed her dwelling place,*

*because of her affliction and the greatness of her bondage:*

*she hath dwelt among the nations and she hath found no rest:*

*all her persecutors have taken her in the midst of straits*. [Lam 1.3]

From the slavery of sin there comes the passing over to the damnation of hell. In such straits, comfort is needed, to turn the wheel, that ran down to death, towards life, and so to the passing over to glory. Thus:

*He will go before you into Galilee; there you will see him* [Mt 28.7]

*Called Nazareth*, meaning ‘flower’, ‘anointing’ or ‘consecration’; for there was found the flower of virginity, the anointing of the sevenfold grace, the consecration of the glorious Virgin.

3. *To a virgin* [Lk 1.27]. There is something similar in Genesis 24:

*Rebecca, an exceeding comely maid, and a most beautiful virgin, and not known to man.* [Gen 24.15-16]

Rebecca (meaning ‘receiving much’) is the blessed Virgin, who truly received much, because she conceived the Son of God, and of her beauty the Son himself says in Canticles 6:

*Thou art beautiful, O my love, sweet and comely as Jerusalem.* [Cant 6.3]

Beautiful in humility, beloved by charity, sweet in contemplation, comely in virginity, like the heavenly Jerusalem wherein God dwells, and the Virgin was his dwelling place. She says:

*He that made me rested in my tabernacle,* [Ecclus 24.12]

that is, in my womb.

*Espoused to a man whose name was Joseph*. St Bede’s Gloss says, "He wanted to be born of an espoused virgin, that the order of his generation might be covered by Joseph, and lest she be stoned as an adulteress; and so that the Virgin might have the support of a husband and a witness to her integrity, and so that the devil might be ignorant of the mystery." Joseph was the saviour who saved Egypt from famine; so this Joseph saved the blessed Virgin from infamy. God would rather that some should doubt his origin, that doubt his mother’s modesty. He well knew that good reputation is easily lost.

*Of the house of David*. This refers not only to Joseph, but also to the Virgin, for both were of the house of David. In the last chapter of Numbers, the Lord says:

*All men shall marry wives of their own tribe and kindred;*

*and all women shall take husbands of the same tribe* [Num 36.7-8]

*And the virgin's name was Mary*. Name of sweetness and name of delight, name comforting the sinner and of blessed hope. What is Mary but 'star of the sea', lighting the way to harbour for those tossing on the bitter waters? A name beloved of the angels, terrible to the demons, health to sinners and sweet to the just.

4. *And the angel being come in to her* [Lk 1.28]. . She was within when the angel came to her, engaged in reading or contemplation, alone, and meaning to be alone. Hosea 2 says of her:

*I will lead her into the wilderness: and I will speak to her heart.* [Hos 2.14]

*'Hail'*; rather than the triple 'Woe' of which the Apocalypse speaks: *Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth* [Apoc 8.13]. She was without the concupiscence of the flesh, without the concupiscence of the eyes and without the pride of life [cf. 1Jn 2.16]; because she was chaste, because she was poor, because she was humble.

*Full of grace*, because she was the first among women to offer to God the glorious gift of virginity, which therefore merited to enjoy the sight and speech of the angel, and which gave the world the author of all grace. *Full of grace*, because

*The sweet smell of thy ointments is above all aromatical spices;*

*thy lips are as a dropping honeycomb,* [Cant 4.10-11]

in which grace is poured out [cf. Ps 44.3].

*The Lord is with thee*; whom he carried up to heavenly things by a new love of chastity, and afterwards, by means of human nature, consecrated with all the fulness of the divinity. *The Lord is with thee*.

*A cluster of Cyprus my love is to me,* [Cant 1.13]

and therefore full of the wine of grace.

Blessed art thou among women. There is a **concordance** in Judges 5:

*Blessed among women be Jahel, may she be blessed in her tent*. [Jg 5.24]

Her name means 'waiting for God'. She was truly blessed, who waited for the blessing of all, and in her expectation received it. Truly blessed, because she was neither barren nor unclean. "She became fertile without blushing, pregnant without heaviness, child-bearing

without pain."[1] Without any other example among woman-kind, she was virgin and mother, and gave birth to God.

5. *Who, having heard, was troubled* [Lk 1.29]. There is a **concordance** in John 5:

*An angel of the Lord descended at certain times into the pond, and the water was moved* [Jn 5.4]

The movement of the waters is like Mary's troubling at the angelic vision and the unaccustomed greeting.

*And thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be*. She was troubled because of her modesty, and from prudence she wondered at the new form of blessing.

*He that is hasty to give credit is light of heart.* [Ecclus 19.4]

What a beautiful mingling of modesty and prudence, so that modesty should not become over-timid, nor prudence over-confident.

*Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God*. He calls her familiarly, by name; and tells her not to be afraid. There is a **concordance** in Esther 5:

*When king Assuerus saw Esther the queen standing, she pleased his eyes, and he held out towards her* (as a sign of clemency) *the golden sceptre which he held in his hand. And she drew near and kissed the top of his sceptre*. [Esth 5.2]

Assuerus (meaning 'blessedness') is God, the blessedness of the angels, whose eyes our queen Esther pleased; (the name means 'prepared in due time', that is, the time of our salvation). The gold sceptre is heavenly grace, which he held out to her when he filled her with grace above all others. Because she was not ungrateful for so great grace, she drew near in humility, and kissed it with charity.

[THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE LORD'S CONCEPTION]

6. The announcement of the Lord's conception: *Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son* [Lk 1.31]. Blessed Bernard[2] says, "There is a double miracle, yet elegantly joined together: God being a son, the Virgin being a mother. Neither should the son have any other mother but a virgin, nor should she bring forth any other son but God." Note that Christ was conceived at Nazareth, born at Bethlehem, and crucified at Jerusalem, as at a more important place. So Christ was conceived in humility, born in charity (the 'house of bread'), and crucified by being lifted up.

7. *And thou shalt call his name Jesus*. Note that we read of five persons who were called by God before they were conceived in the womb. The first was Isaac, of whom Genesis

17 says:

*Sara thy wife shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name Isaac.* [Gen 17.19]

The second was Samson, of whom Judges 13 says:

*The angel said to the wife of Manue: Thou shalt conceive and bear a son.* [Jg 13.3]

The third was Josias, of whom III Kings 13 says:

*Behold, a child shall be born to the house of David, Josias by name.* [3(1)Kg 13.2]

The fourth and fifth were John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. In these five, there are noted five kinds of chosen.

In Isaac (meaning 'laughter') we see charitable people who are always laughing in mind. As Job 29 says:

*If at any time I laughed on them, they believed not;*

*and the light of my countenance fell not on earth*. [Job 29.24]

The souls countenance is the reason, whose light is grace, and of which is said:

*The light of thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us.* [Ps 4.7]

The charitable man serves in the 'laughter' of devotion, and detractors do not believe him, rather they criticise. But because of this, his brightness should not fall to the ground, rather he should always work in the light of reason, in joy of mind.

In Samson (meaning 'their sun') we see those who preach the word of God, who in word and example should be the 'sun' of those to whom they preach. He says, *You are the light of the world* [Mt 5.14]. The sun is called the source of heat and light, in which we see life and doctrine, which should flow from them, like two streams from a fountain, to other people. Their lives should be warm, their teaching clear.

In Josias (meaning 'place of incense, or of sacrifice') we see true religious, in whom is the incense of devout prayer and the sacrifice of mortified flesh; whence Daniel 3 says:

*In a contrite heart and humble spirit let us be accepted;*

*and so let our sacrifice be made, that it may please thee* [Dan 3.39-40]

In the Baptist we see all penitents and good secular folk who baptize and sanctify themselves in the Jordan (the ‘river of judgement’), that is, in tears and confession, in bestowal of alms and in other works of mercy.

In Jesus the Saviour we see all good prelates of the Church, of whom Obadiah says:

*Saviours shall come up into mount of the South to judge the mount of Esau:*

*and the kingdom shall be for the Lord*. [Ob 1.21]

The mount of the South is the excellence of a good life, which prelates should go up so as to be able to judge (that is, to condemn) the mount of Esau, the pride of carnal folk; and so in them and from them they will make a kingdom for the Lord. Amen.

[THE OVERSHADOWING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT]

8. The overshadowing of the Holy Spirit: *How shall this be done, because I know not man?* [Lk 1.34]. Although she believed what was to be done, she enquired how it was to come about. "She asked how it might be, because she had vowed in her heart not to know a man, unless God should dispose otherwise."[3] The Gloss of Ambrose says, "When Sara laughed at God’s promise, and Mary said, ‘How shall this be?’ why were they not made dumb, like Zacharias? But Sara and Mary did not doubt what was to happen, they asked how. Zacharias denied that he knew, denied that he believed, and sought further authority for believing. And so he received the sign of silence, because signs are not given to believers, but to unbelievers."

*And the angel, answering, said to her: The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee* [Lk 1.35]. Because he had previously said ‘full of grace’, and now says ‘will come upon thee’, we must understand that, just as when something is added to a full vessel it overflows, so some drops of her grace would overflow to us. When the Holy Spirit came upon the Virgin, he both purified her mind from the stain of sin, so that she should be worthy of the heavenly birth; and created in her womb, by his operation, a body for the Redeemer from the flesh of the Virgin.

*And the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee*. In this we understand both natures of the Saviour, because a shadow is formed from light and a corporeal object. The Virgin could not contain the fulness of the divinity, but the power of the Most High ‘overshadowed’, when the incorporeal light of the divinity took in her a body of humanity, so that God might be able to suffer.

*And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God*. Jesus was born holy, overcoming the usual state of corruptible nature, and not being conceived through sexual intercourse. We who are constrained by the state of corruptible nature can be sanctified by grace. It was fitting that since a virgin conceived contrary to nature, she should give birth to the Son of God beyond all human capability.

*And, behold, Elizabeth*, etc. [Lk 1.36]. So that the Virgin should not lose hope of giving birth, she received the example of her barren kinswoman's pregnancy, so that she might learn that all things are possible to God, which seem to be contrary to the order of nature.

9. *And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord* [Lk 1.38]. She did not boast of her singular privilege, but, mindful in all things of her own condition and of the divine condescension, she professed herself to be the handmaid of him whose mother she had been chosen to be, and with great devotion she made her own choice to fulfil the promise of the angel.

*Be it done unto me according to thy word*. "Immediately, Christ was conceived of the Virgin, fully man in soul and body, even though the outline and structure of his body and limbs could not be discerned. He is believed to have been conceived on the twenty-fifth of March, and to have died on the same day, thirty-three years later."[4] Blessed is he for ever.

[MORAL SERMON]

10. *The angel Gabriel was sent*, etc. We have heard how blessed Mary conceived the Son of God the Father; let us now hear briefly how the soul conceives the spirit of salvation. The Virgin Mary is the faithful soul; a 'virgin' by integrity of faith, whence the Apostle says:

*I have espoused you to one husband,*

*that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ;* [2Cor 11.2]

and 'Mary' ('star of the sea') by the confession of that faith.

*With the heart we believe unto justice-*

there is the 'virgin'; but,

*with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation-* [Rom 10.10]

there is the star which leads from the bitterness of the world to the harbour of eternal life. She lives in Nazareth of Galilee, that is, in the 'flower of passing across'. This flower is the hope of fruit; she hopes to pass across from faith to sight, from shadow to truth, from promise to reality, from flower to fruit, from the visible to the invisible. So the shepherds said:

*Let us go over to Bethlehem,* [Lk 2.15]

because there we shall find good pasture, the bread of angels, the Incarnate Word. So Isaiah 32 says:

*A joy of wild asses, the pasture of flocks.* [Is 32.14]

the wild asses are the just, whose joy will be the pasture of the flocks, the glory and blessedness of the angels; because they will feed together with them, that is, they will be satisfied with the vision of the Incarnate Word.

The angel Gabriel is sent to this virgin, his name meaning 'God has comforted me'. He represents the inspiration of divine grace, without whose comfort the soul fails. So Judith 13 says:

*Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, at this hour. And she struck twice upon the neck of Holofernes, and cut off his head*. [Jdth 13.9-10]

Holofernes means 'weakening the fatted calf'; meaning the sinner who is fattened by the richness of temporal things, and who is deprived of virtue by the devil, and so is weakened and emasculated. The head of Holofernes is the devil's pride. So Genesis 3 says:

*She shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel,* [Gen 3.15]

meaning the end of life. Blessed Mary crushed the pride of the devil with her humility, but he lay in wait as it were for her heel, in the Passion of her Son. He who wants to cut out the devil's pride from himself, must strike him twice. The two-fold blow is the remembrance of our birth and of our death. Whoever thinks well on these, cuts off the devil's pride from himself; but he must first ask for the comfort of divine grace. As it is said:

*Do ye manfully, and let your heart be strengthened.* [Ps 30.25]

11. *And the angel being come in to her*. Herein is noted the solitude of the soul, in which she dwells by herself, reading the book of her own misery, looking upon the divine sweetness. So she merits to hear, 'Hail'. The name 'Eva' ('woe' or calamity) reverses the word 'Ave'.[5] The name of the soul existing in mortal sin is 'Eva' ('woe of calamity'); but when she is converted to penitence, she hears 'Ave' (*a-vae*, 'without woe').

*Full of grace*. He who overfills a brimming vessel loses what he pours in. If the soul is full of grace, there is no room for the uncleanness of sin to enter. Grace wholly occupies it, leaving not the least empty corner into which the contrary might enter or remain. He who sells everything, desires to possess everything. The soul is so wide that nothing can fill it

except God alone, who (as John says) *is greater than our heart and knoweth all things* [1Jn 3.20]. A totally full vessel overflows on every side. All the senses receive from the fulness of the soul, for, as Isaiah says,

*There shall be sabbath after sabbath,* [Is 66.23]

that is, peace of the senses and the bodily members after interior peace.

*The Lord is with thee*. On the other hand, Exodus 33 says:

*I will not go up with thee, because thou art a stiff-necked people,* [Ex 33.3]

that is, disobedient and proud. It is as if he said, I would go up with you, if you were humble. So, in Isaiah 43, he promises the humble:

*Thou art my servant; when thou shalt pass through the waters I will be with thee, and the rivers shall not cover thee. When thou shalt walk in the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, and the flames shall not burn thee*. [Is 43.1-2]

The waters are the devil's suggestions, the rivers are gluttony and lust, the fire is abundance of money or temporal goods, and the flame is vainglory. The servant (the humble soul with whom the Lord is) passes unscathed through the devils temptations, for neither gluttony nor lust cover him. He whose head is covered can neither see, smell, speak or hear properly; he who is covered by gluttony and lust is unable to contemplate, discern, confess or obey virtue. Even though the humble soul walks in the fire of temporal things, yet she will not from them be burnt by avarice or vainglory.

12. *Blessed art thou among women*. Natural History says that women are of greater piety than men, and more quickly shed tears, and have strong memories. These three denote compassion for one's neighbour, the devotion of tears, and the remembrance of the Lord's Passion. Canticles 8 says:

*Put me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm: for love is strong as death*; [Cant 8.6]

your love, on account of which you died. Blessed are those souls who have these three properties; among them, the faithful and humble soul, full of works of charity, is blessed with the prerogative of a special blessing.

Regarding this blessing, there follows: *Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus*. Natural History says pregnant women are affected by pain and weakness of appetite, and their sight is dimmed. Some women, after becoming pregnant, have an aversion to wine, because they are weakened by drinking it. In the same way the soul, when she conceives the spirit of salvation by the

operation of the Holy Spirit [cf. Is 26.18], begins to grieve for her sins, to lose the appetite for temporal things, and to be dissatisfied with herself (thus 'dimming the eye' with which she usually regards herself). She recoils from the wine of lust. You can tell from these signs that a soul has conceived the spirit of salvation, which she bears when she brings it out into the light of good works. She gives it the name of salvation, because whatever she does she does with a view to salvation. It is said that intention 'gives a name' to one's work. She works to please God, to receive forgiveness, to edify her neighbour, and to come to eternal salvation. May he deign to grant us this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

13. *Behold a great and strong wind before the Lord overthrowing the mountains,*

*and breaking the rocks in pieces: the Lord is not in the wind.*

*And after the wind an earthquake: the Lord is not in the earthquake.*

*And after the earthquake a fir: the Lord is not in the fire.*

*And after the fire the whisper of a gentle breeze*. [3(1)Kg 19.11-12]

In that is the Lord; the text comes from III Kings 19. Four things are to be noted here: the angel's greeting, the troubling of blessed Mary, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the Incarnation of the Son of God.

14. The angel's greeting: *Hail, full of grace*; there is *a great and strong wind*. The greeting is called a 'wind' or 'spirit', because it was sent to a spiritual person by the angelic spirit. It is 'great', promising great things, and 'strong', because it came by the strong Gabriel regarding the strong king of glory.

Alternatively, these three words correspond to the three phrases of the greeting. 'Hail, full of grace' is the 'wind', being about nothing earthly, nothing of the flesh, but entirely of the spirit, because of grace. The first woman was Eve, earthly and from the earth, flesh of flesh and bone of bone. To her was said 'Woe!', because,

*I will multiply thy sorrows, and in sorrow shalt thou bring forth.* [Gen 3.16]

But to blessed Mary, *whose conversation was already in heaven* [cf. Phil 3.20], was said, 'Hail, full of grace'.

Note that the angel did not say, 'Hail, Mary', but, 'Hail, full of grace'. We say, 'Hail, Mary' ('star of the sea'), because we are in the midst of the sea, tossed by the waves and submerged by the storm. So we cry 'Star of the sea!', that through her we may come

to the harbour of salvation. She it is who rescues those who call on her from the storm, shows them the way, and leads them to harbour. Angels need no rescuing from shipwreck, being safe in their homeland, *whom the glory of God illuminates, and their lamp is the Lamb* [cf. Apoc 21.23]. And so the angel did not say, 'Hail, Mary'. But we poor souls, cast into the see from before God's eyes, at every hour storm-tossed and at death's door, cry continually, 'Hail, Mary'.

*The Lord is with thee*. This corresponds to 'great'. Truly it was a great thing, to have in her womb the Lord 'whom heaven and earth cannot contain' [cf. 3(1)Kg 8.27], and to carry him for nine months.

*Blessed art thou among women*. Behold, 'strong'. It says in Judges 5:

*Blessed among women be Jahel, who put her left hand to the nail, and her right to the workman's hammer: and she struck Sisara in the head.* [Jg 5.24-26]

And in Judith 14:

*One Hebrew woman hath made confusion in the house of king Nabuchodonosor. For behold, Holofernes lieth upon the ground; and his head is not upon him*. [Jdth 14.16]

And in chapter 13:

*Ozias, the prince of the people of Israel, said to Judith: Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord the most high God, above all women upon the earth*. [Jdth 13.23]

The peg which shut the door of the tabernacle is the virginity of blessed Mary:

*This gate shall be shut and shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it.* [Ezek 44.2]

The hammer, shaped like a 'T' is the cross of the Lord's Passion. Sisara (meaning, 'exclusion from joy') is the devil, who ever toils to exclude men from eternal joy. He was killed by the virginity of blessed Mary and her Son's Passion; he knew not the secret of either, and he lost his power by the power of both. And so, blessed is she among all women and above all women, who made confusion in the house of the devil, cut off the chieftain's head, and restored peace to us.

And so there follows: *overthrowing the mountains* (meaning pride)*, and breaking the rocks in pieces* (the hardness and malice of the demons). *The Lord hath blessed thee by his power*, O blessed among the angels, *because by thee he hath brought our enemies to nought*. [Jdth 13.22]

*The Lord was not in the wind*, because it was not in the greeting that the Incarnation of

the Word happened. First she asked how, and learned by asking. From learning she consented, and from her consent the conceived. One must go step by step, going up in stages.

15. The troubling of blessed Mary is represented by: *After the wind, an earthquake*. *She was troubled at his saying*, maybe because she heard herself called 'blessed among women', she who was already blessed among the angels. So Judith 15 says:

*Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honour of our people; for thou hast done manfully, and thy heart has been strengthened, because thou hast loved chastity*. [Jdth 15.10]

Or maybe she was troubled because she heard herself proclaimed what she did not feel herself to be. St Gregory[6] says: "It is a mark of the elect that they think themselves less than they are." It is the greatest virtue not to see one's own virtue, and good to conceal from oneself what is clear to the eyes of others. She gave us an example, to be troubled at our own praise, and always to think ourselves less than we are, or hear from other people.

So Natural History says that shells which conceive pearls from heavenly dew, if a bright light suddenly shines on them, compress themselves with fear and shut with a sudden fear, lest their offspring be tainted. So it was with blessed Mary, who conceived the pearl of the angels from the heavenly dew:

*Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above.* [Is 45.8]

At the bright light of the angel she was suddenly troubled. That is why we sing, "The Virgin trembled at the light"[7] So we too, who want to conceive the pearl of a holy life in the dew of grace, should suddenly fear at the shining of human praise, and should compress and humble ourselves, shut ourselves up so as not to go outside, lest we lose by human favour what we have so well conceived. *The Lord* (the Incarnation of the Word) *was not in the earthquake*, the troubling of blessed Mary.

16. The coming of the Holy Spirit: *And after the earthquake, a fire*. *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee*, a fire that illuminates without burning.

Note that fire rises above all things. It cannot be held, and it turns to its own operation the things in which it is engendered. It transforms to its own nature all things in any way drawing near to it. It is renewed, not lessened, in transmitting itself. So with the Holy Spirit, equal to the Father and the Son. He rises above all things:

*The Spirit of the Lord moved over the waters,* [Gen 1.2]

like the mind of a craftsman brooding over the work to be done. His power is

incomprehensible, and *thou knowest not whence he cometh and whither he goeth* [Jn 3.8]. He sets afire the souls in which he is engendered, and they set fire to others. He transmits himself to all, and those who approach him feel his warmth. He renews; hence: *Send forth thy spirit*, etc. [Ps 103.30]. He raises the mind above; and however much he diffuses his grace on every side, he remains the same in himself.

This fire came upon the Virgin, and filled her with the charism of graces. But in this fire, the Incarnation of the Word was not yet, but waited for the consent of the Virgin. No-one can conceive God in their mind, except by consent of the mind. Whatever is in the mind apart from its consent, cannot justify a man.

17. The Incarnation of the Word: *And after the fire, the whisper of a gentle breeze*; and in that was the Lord. *Behold the handmaid of the Lord*, she whispered. And immediately, *The Word was made flesh* [Jn 1.14]. Note that we whistle or whisper by contracting our mouth. Blessed Mary contracted herself: though queen of angels, she called herself a handmaid, today the Lord looked upon the humility of his handmaid [cf. Lk 1.48]. This is **concordant** to Judith 15:

*Joachim the high priest came from Jerusalem to Bethulia, to see Judith*. [Jdth 15.9]

Joachim (meaning ‘man of preparation’) is Jesus Christ, who said: *I go to prepare a place for you* [Jn 14.2]; and who *by his own blood entered once into the Holies* [Heb 9.12]. He came today from the heavenly Jerusalem to Bethulia, meaning ‘the house giving birth to the Lord’. This is the blessed Virgin, who gave birth to him, whom he came in his own person to see, to dwell in, and to take flesh from. To him be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

18. *Behold, a great and strong wind*. Four things are noted here: the wrath of the coming Judge, the sentencing of the damned, the burning Gehenna, and the glory of the blessed.

The wrath of the Judge who is to come: *Behold a great wind*, etc. Isaiah 28 says of this:

*A spirit of judgement of him that sitteth on the throne.* [Is 28.6]

And in chapter 27:

*In that day, the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword shall visit Leviathan the bar serpent, and Leviathan the crooked serpent, and shall slay the whale that is in the sea*. [Is 27.1]

The Son is called a sword, which the Father will brandish in the judgement. The

brandishing of a sword causes two things- a brightness and a shaking shadow. So Christ in the judgement will show the glory of divinity to the just, and the form of the human nature he took to the unjust, so that they may *look on him whom they pierced* [cf. Jn 19.37; Apoc 1.7]. This sword is called 'hard', because it cannot be turned aside by prayer or price; it is 'great', because it reaches all things; and 'strong', because it strikes all things. And so, in the day of judgement, the Father will, in his Son, visit Leviathan, the devil, and his minions. He is called 'serpent' because of his craftiness, 'bar' because of his inflexible pride, 'crooked' from envy and a 'whale' who swallows everything. So are his followers, too, in whose conversation, bitter with sins, the devil dwells. Then will be that spirit that *overthrows the mountains,* the powerful and proud of this world*, and breaks the rocks* of unfaithful hearts.

19. The sentencing of the damned: *And after the wind, an earthquake*. Isaiah 24 says of this:

*With breaking shall the earth be broken* (i.e. the proud)

*with crushing shall the earth be crushed* (the avaricious),

*with trembling shall the earth be moved* (the wrathful),

*with shaking shall the earth be shaken as a drunken man,* (the gluttonous and lustful) [Is 24.19-20].

All day the Lord cries out: *Come to me, all you that labour* [Mt 11.28], and they will not come. Then they will hear: *Depart, you cursed* [Mt 25.41]. What an earthquake there will be then, noise and tumult, grief and groaning, gnashing of teeth and weeping; when that monster the devil is cast into hell with all the wicked!

20. The burning Gehenna: *And after the earthquake, a fire*. Isaiah says, in the last chapter:

*Behold, the Lord will come with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind.:*

*to render his wrath in indignation and his rebuke with flames of fire,*

*for the Lord shall judge by fire*. [Is 66.15-16]

And the last chapter of Judith:

*He will give fire, and worms into their flesh,*

*that they may burn, and may feel for ever*. [Jdth 16.21]

21. The glory of the blessed: *And after the fire, the whisper of a gentle breeze: Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom* [Mt 25.34]. There is the Lord, sweet and gentle, worthy of praise and love, loving and kind. He is not like that in the wind of anger, the earthquake of damnation, the Gehenna of fire; but in the whisper of a gentle breeze, his unspeakable mercy. So he says in Zechariah 10:

*I will whistle for them and I will gather them together,*

*because I have redeemed them*. [Zech 10.8]

Then, as Isidore says, the saints will know more fully what good grace has brought them, and what would have happened if the divine mercy had not freely chosen them, and how true it is, what is sung in the Psalm:

*Mercy and judgement I will sing to thee , O Lord.* [Ps 100.1]

This we should know most certainly, that no-one is set free except by undeserved grace, and no-one is damned except by well-deserved judgement.

Let us then beware, beloved, of the wind of pride, of the earthquake of avarice and wrath, of the fire of gluttony and lust; wherein the Lord is not. And let us humble ourselves in the whisper of our confession and self-accusation, of meekness and peace, because the Lord is there; and then we will deserve to hear in the day of judgement: Come, ye blessed. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] cf. BERNARD, Sunday within the octave of the Assumption, 7; PL 183.433

[2] cf. BERNARD, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, sermon 4,5; PL 183.428

[3] P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, in Evangelia*, 2; PL 198.1537

[4] P.COMESTOR, *Ibid*.

[5] ‘Eva’, ‘vae’ and ‘Ave’ are anagrams of one another.

[6] GREGORY, *Moralia*, XXXIV,22,43; PL 76.742

[7] ROMAN BREVIARY, 3rd response at Matins, First Sunday in Advent.

# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE LORD'S SUPPER

1. *Jesus, rising from supper, laid aside his garments; and, having taken a towel, girded himself. After that, he put water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded*. [Jn 13.4-5]

[PROLOGUE: THE LORD'S SUPPER COMPARED TO ABRAHAM'S}

2. There is something similar in Genesis 18; Abraham said:

*I will fetch a little water; and wash ye your feet, and rest ye under the tree. And I will set a morsel of bread, and strengthen ye your heart*. [Gen 18.4-5]

What Abraham did for the three angels, Christ did for his holy Apostles, the ambassadors of truth who were to preach the faith of the Holy Trinity to the whole world. He knelt like a servant at their feet, and, kneeling, washed their feet. O incomprehensible humility! O ineffable kindness! He who is worshipped by the angels on heaven knelt at the feet of fishermen. That head before which the angels tremble bowed to the feet of poor men. Peter, therefore, cried in fear: *Thou shalt never wash my feet* [Jn 13.8]. He could not bear that God should humble himself at his feet, and was overcome with fear. The Lord said to him: *If I wash thee not, thou shalt have no part in me* [Jn 13.8]. The Gloss says, "He who is not washed by Baptism or Confession has no part with Jesus."

*After he had washed their feet* [cf. Jn 13.12], he made them rest under the tree that was himself. As it says:

*I sat down under his shadow, whom I desired; and his fruit was sweet to my palate*. [Cant 2.3]

The 'fruit' is his body and blood, which he gave them today. This is the 'morsel of bread' which he set before them, to strengthen their hearts for the labours they were to undergo. As it says:

*Whilst they were at supper, Jesus took bread and blessed and broke.* [Mt 26.26]

He broke, to show that the breaking of his body would not be against his will. He blessed first, because, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, he filled the nature which he took with the grace of divine power. He aid:

*Take ye and eat. This is my body*. [Mt 26.26]

"We should understand the word ‘blessed’ as implying, ‘saying: This is my Body’; then he broke it and gave it, saying, ‘Eat’; and he repeated, ‘This is my Body’."[1]

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

3. Let us see what is meant, allegorically, by the supper, the garments and the linen towel, the water, the basin, and the feet of the disciples.

The supper is the Father’s glory; the putting aside of the garments is the emptying of his majesty; the linen towel is his pure flesh; the water is the shedding of his blood or the infusion of grace; the basin is the hearts of the disciples, and the feet are their affections. *He rose*, then, *from the supper* which he shared with God the Father:

*A man made a great supper and invited many.* [Lk 14.16]

It was ‘great’, because it abounded in the splendour of the glory of the divine majesty, in the riches of the angelic beatitude, and in the delights of the two-fold glorification. Many are called to this, but few come, because *the number of fools is infinite* [Eccles 1.15], and they let go the banquet of life for the dung of temporal things. A pig would rather sleep in the mud than in a fine bed. Christ rose from the supper of his happiness, to make them rise from the misery of their dung-hill.

*He laid aside his garments*. "Note that there are four strippings of Christ’s garments. At the supper, he laid them aside and resumed them; at the pillar he was stripped and re-clothed; at the soldiers’ mocking he was stripped and re-clothed, for he is not said to have been naked before Herod; at the Cross he was stripped, and remained naked. The first stripping concerned the Apostles, whom he soon took back; the second was for those who were taken back on the day of Pentecost, and who are little by little taken back; the third was for the remainder who will be taken back at the last day; the fourth concerns the perverse half of our own time, which will never be taken back. The second and fourth are represented today in some churches, when the altars are stripped and bunches of twigs like scourges are cut and sprinkled with water and wine."[2] To lay aside one’s garments is to empty himself; he resumed them after the washing, because, when his obedience was accomplished, he returned to the Father from whom he had come.

We read in the Passion of Saint Sebastian[3] that a certain king had a gold ring, set with a precious jewel, very dear to him. It fell from his finger into the sewer, and he was very sad about it. When he could not find anyone who might be able to get the ring out, he put

aside his royal robes and clothed himself in sacking, to go down into the sewer. He searched for a long time, and in the end found the ring, and when he had found it took it back joyfully to his palace. The king is the Son of God, the ring is the human race. The jewel in the ring is the precious soul in man. This fell from the joy of paradise, as it were from God's finger, into the sewer of hell. On losing it, the Son of God grieved much. To recover the ring, he sought among angels and men, and found no-one capable of helping. Then he put off his robes, emptying himself and putting on the sack-cloth of our wretchedness. He sought the ring for thirty years, and at length descended into hell, and their found Adam and his posterity, and having found them, carried them back joyfully to eternal bliss.

4. There follows: *and, having taken a towel, girded himself*. He took the towel of our humanity from the most pure flesh of the Virgin. Regarding this, there is a **concordance** in Ezekiel 10:

*The Lord said to the man that was clothed with linen: Go in between the wheels that are under the cherubims*. [Ezek 10.2]

The wheel, that returns to the same point from which it began, is human nature, to which was said: *You are earth, and to earth you shall go* [cf. Gen 3.19]. 'Between' implies two extremes, namely the beginning and the end. Note that human nature has three characteristics: an unclean conception, a wretched journeying, and an ashy death. The man clothed in linen is Jesus Christ, who took a linen garment from the blessed Virgin. He did not begin with an impure conception, because he was conceived by the most pure Virgin by the working of the Holy Spirit; nor yet did he end in human ashes, for: *Thou wilt not give thy holy one to see corruption* [Ps 15.10]; but he came in the middle state of our pilgrimage, poor, exiled and pilgrim, having scarcely any place in the whole world.

So in II Esdras 2, Nehemiah says:

*There was no place for the beast on which I rode to pass.* [Neh 2.14]

Nehemiah (meaning 'consolation of the Lord') is Christ, our consolation in our time of desolation. So Isaiah 25 says:

*Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress,*

*a refuge from the whirlwind, a shadow from the heat*. [Is 25.4]

He is our consolation in the tribulation of worldly adversity, in the whirlwind of the devil's temptation, in the heat of lust and vainglory. His 'beast' is his humanity, upon which his divinity sat. This beast, upon which he placed the wounded man, the human race, had no place in all the world, for *he had nowhere to lay his head* [cf. Mt 8.20; Lk 9.58], except where *he bowed his head and gave up his spirit* [Jn 19.30]. He went in, then, *between*

*the wheels which were under the cherubims*, because he was *made a little less than the angels* [Heb 2.7; Ps 8.6] when he took the linen towel with which he girded himself. He girded himself with humility in that flesh, because it was necessary for there to be as much humility in the Redeemer as there had been pride in the betrayer.

5. There follows: *He put water into a basin*. The Gloss says, "He poured his blood on the ground, to cleanse the feet of believers, which were soiled with earthly sins." Note that a basin is a hollow vessel, which gives a ringing sound and has a curved lip. Such was the heart of the Apostles, and would it were ours! Hollow by humility, ringing with devotion, having the curved lip of self-accusation. This basin was for washing feet. The Lord poured the water of grace into the heart of the Apostles on the day of Pentecost; he sends it every day into the hearts of the faithful, that their feet (their affections) may be washed from all defilement. This is what he says in Job 29:

*I washed my feet with butter,* [Job 29.6]

in whose richness the devotion of the mind is represented, whereby Job ('sorrowful' for his sins) washes the affections of his mind.

*And wiped them with the towel wherewith which he was girded*, because all the Lord's bodily affliction, and our suffering, is a purifying. With this towel we must wipe away the sweat of our labour and the blood of our suffering, following the example of his patience in all our trials, so that we may rejoice with him in his glory. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

6. *The Lord of hosts shall make unto all people, in this mountain, a feast of fat things:*

*a feast of wine, of fat things full of marrow, of wine purified from the lees*. [Is 25.6]

This comes from Isaiah 25; Matthew 26 says of this banquet:

*Whilst they were at supper, Jesus took bread and blessed and broke and gave to his disciples and said: Take ye and eat. This is my body. And, taking the chalice, he gave thanks and gave to them, saying: Drink ye all of this. This is my blood of the new Testament;* [Mt 26.26-28]

confirming it. Note that Christ did four things today: he washed the Apostles' feet, he gave them his body and blood, he spoke a long and precious discourse, and he prayed to the Father for them and for all who would believe in him. Behold the 'feast of fat things'!

He himself, then, is *the Lord of hosts*, that is, of angels. This night he spoke of them to

Peter:

*Thinkest thou that I cannot ask my Father, and he will give me presently more than twelve legions of angels?* [Mt 26.53]

That is to say, I do not need the help of twelve Apostles, being able to have twelve legions of angels, each of seventy-two thousands.

*In this mountain*, namely Jerusalem, in that 'large dining room, furnished' [cf. Mk 14.15], in which also the Apostles received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, he made *a feast of fat things* today *for all people* who believed in him. Truly today's banquet is 'a feast of fat things'; for there is the fatted calf which the Father killed in the reconciliation of the human race. So, in Luke 15, he says:

*Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and make merry; because this my son was dead and is come to life again, was lost and is found. And they began to be merry*. [Lk 15.23-24]

The Gloss says, "Preach Christ as born, and set forth his death; so that both the heart may believe by imitating the one who is slain, and the mouth may receive the sacrament of his Passion for its cleansing."

Today, this is what the universal Church does; he established for her today on mount Sion *a feast of fat things full of marrow*, a two-fold richness, both inward and outward: he gave them his true body, inwardly and outwardly fattened with all spiritual strength and charity, and he bade them give it to those who believed in him. Whence, "It is firmly to be believed, and confessed with the mouth, that the very body which the Virgin bore, which hung on the Cross and lay in the tomb, which rose the third day and ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven: this body the Church truly makes daily, and gives to her faithful."[4] At the words: *This is my body*, bread is transubstantiated into the body of Christ, which confers an unction of double richness on whoever receives it worthily. It lessens temptation and stirs up devotion. And so it is called 'a land flowing with honey and milk' [cf. Dt 31.20], which makes sweet what is bitter and nourishes devotion.

Unhappy he, who comes in to this banquet without the wedding garment [cf. Mt 22.11] of charity or penitence, because *he who eats unworthily, eats damnation to himself* [cf. 1Cor 11.29]. *What fellowship has light with darkness?* [cf. 2Cor 6.14-15]; Judas the traitor with the Saviour? *The hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table* [Lk 22.21], he says.

*If a beast* (a bestial man)

*should touch the mountain* (the body of Christ),

*it should be stoned* (i.e. damned). [Heb 12.20; cf. Ex 19.12-13]

7. There follows: *a feast of wine purified from the lees*, that is, pure or purified from everything foul and filthy. This is what Moses spoke of in his Canticle:

*That they might drink the purest blood of the grape.* [Dt 32.14]

The grape is the humanity of Christ, which was pressed in the wine-press of the Cross, and sent forth blood on every side, which he gave the Apostles today to drink, saying:

*This is my blood, which shall be shed for you and for many, unto remission of sins.* [cf. Mt 26.28]

The wine purified from the less must indeed be purest of all, which is poured out for the remission of so many sins.

O charity of the Beloved! O love of the Bridegroom for his Bride the Church! His own blood, which on the morrow he must shed for her by the hands of unbelievers, today he offered her by his own most holy hands. And so she says in Canticles 1:

*A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me: he shall abide between my breasts.*

*A cluster of Cyprus my love is to me in the vineyards of Engaddi*. [Cant 1.12-13]

The Bride-Church, or the soul, enters the wood of all the afflictions and sufferings of her Spouse, and humbly gathers now insults there, now blows and spitting here, now jeers and scourging on one side, now on the other the Cross, nails and lance; and makes herself a bundle of myrrh, of sorrow and bitterness, and puts it in her breast, where her heart is, where her love is. The Beloved, who tomorrow will be a bundle of myrrh for his Bride, today is to her a cluster of Cyprus.

*My chalice which inebriateth me,* (the ‘cluster of Cyprus’)

*how goodly it is!* [Ps 22.5] (the purified wine, the most pure blood of the grape).

And where is it found? Whence does it spring? *In the vineyards of Engeddi* (meaning ‘spring of the kid’, the stinking goat). The vineyards of Engeddi are the wounds of our Beloved, wherein is a living spring of water, purifying all foulness, washing all filth away. In this spring the thief washed his crimes, when he confessed:

*Remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom*. [Lk 23.42]

Of this spring Zechariah 13 says:

*In that day there shall be a fountain open to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: for the washing of the sinner and of the unclean woman*. [Zech 13.1]

Look! The fountain is open, and communicates itself to all! Come, then, and draw, and washe away your hidden sins and those which are manifest (represented by the unclean woman).

8. Behold our Beloved, a cluster of Cyprus, a bundle of myrrh, in this banquet celebrated with rich food and fine drink; Then *a hymn being said, he went out with his disciples to mount Olivet* [cf. Mt 26.30]. He spent the whole of this night sleepless, so as to transact carefully the business of our salvation. He drew apart from the Apostles, he began to grow sorrowful even unto death, to fall on his knees before the Father, and ask that, if it were possible, the hour might pass him by; yet submitting his own will to the Father's [cf. Mt 26.38-39]. Being in an agony, his sweat became as drops of blood [cf. Lk 22.44]. After this he was betrayed by a disciple's kiss, bound, and led away like a thief [cf. Mt 26.47,50,55; Lk 22.47-48,52]. His face was veiled, he was spat on [cf. Lk 22.63-64; Mk 14.65]. His beard was plucked, he was struck on the head with a reed, and buffeted with blows [cf. Mk 15.17-19]. He was scourged at the pillar, crowned with thorns and condemned to death. The wood of the Cross was laid on his shoulders and he went out to Calvary [cf. Jn 19.1-2,17]. He was stripped of his garments, crucified naked between two thieves, given gall and vinegar to drink, blasphemed by the passers-by [Mt 27.34,39; Mk 15.23,27-30; Lk 23.33-36]. And what more? Life died on behalf of the dead. O eyes of our Beloved, closed in death! O face on which the angels long to look [cf. 1Pt 1.12], grown so pale! O lips, distilling the honeyed words of eternal life, grown livid! O head, before which angels tremble, hanging bowed! Those hands, at whose touch leprosy departed, life returned, lost light was restored, the demons fled, bread was multiplied: those hands, I say, Alas! Pierced with nails, flowing with blood!

Let us gather all these things together, dearest brothers, and make a bundle of myrrh, and place it between our breasts (that is, let us carry it in our hearts), especially this day and tomorrow, so that we may deserve to rise with him on the third day. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[ANAGOGICAL SERMON]

9. *The Lord of hosts shall make* etc. Let us see what these five: the mountain, the feast, fatness, marrow and wine, mean anagogically. The mountain is our heavenly homeland, of which Isaiah 30 says:

*You shall have a song as the voice of a sanctified solemnity,*

*and joy of heart as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord,*

*to the Mighty One of Israel*. [Is 30.29]

Note these three: the song, joy, and the pipe. "The song is vocal praise," which, as Cassiodorus says, will be in heaven. As it is said: *They shall praise thee for ever and eve*. [Ps 83.5], "in joy, jubilant in heart." The pipe is the harmonious melody of body and soul, which we shall have perfectly in the general resurrection; and we shall enter the mountain of our heavenly home with it, singing and rejoicing; to Jesus Christ the strong , who has delivered Israel from the hand of the mighty, that is, his faithful for whom he has prepared a feast on the heavenly mountain.

Luke 22 says of this:

*I dispose to you, as my Father has disposed to me, a kingdom; that you may eat and drink at my table in the kingdom of heaven*. [Lk 22.29-30]

The table, which is set before all the saints for their fulfilment, is the glory of heavenly life. In this there will be three banquets: of fat things, of marrow and of pure wine; denoting the threefold joy of the blessed. The banquet of fat things denotes that joy which they will have in the vision of the whole Trinity. The banquet of marrow denotes that which they will have in their own blessedness, and inward clarity of conscience. David prayed for these two:

*Let my soul be filled as with marrow and fatness:*

*and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips*. [Ps 62.6]

The purified wine denotes the joy of the whole Church Triumphant, which will be truly purified when *this mortal will put on immortality, and this corruptible incorruption* [cf. 1Cor 15.53]. May he grant us this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, in Evangelia*, 152; PL 198.1618

[2] P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, in Evangelia*, 150; PL 198.1616-7

[3] cf. Acts of St Sebastian, 13,4; PL 17.1132-1133

[4] cf. COUNCIL OF ROME VI (1079), Oath for Berengarius of Tours, priest; PL 148.817

[5] cf. CASSIODORUS, *In Psalterium praefatio*, 6; PL 70.16

# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD

1. *The almond-tree shall flourish, the locust shall grow fat, and the caper shall be scattered.* This text is found in the last chapter of Ecclesiastes [Eccles 12.5].

[PROLOGUE: THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST IN THE RESURRECTION, FLOWERING LIKE AARON'S ROD]

2. There is something similar in Numbers 17. We read that the rod of Aaron budded, flowered, and when the leaves were spread produced almonds [cf. Num 17.8]. Aaron, the high priest, is Jesus Christ, who *not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood entered into the Holies* [cf. Heb 9.12]. He is the 'pontiff' (bridge-builder) who made himself a bridge whereby we might pass from the bank of mortality to the bank of immortality. Today, his rod flowered, the rod being his humanity, of which it is said:

*The Lord will send forth the rod of thy power from Sion.* [Ps 109.2]

Through the humanity of Christ, his divinity exercised its power, and it originated 'from Sion', the Jewish people, because *salvation is of the Jews* [Jn 4.22]. This rod, as it were dried up, lay in the tomb for three days and three nights; but today it flowered and brought forth fruit, because he rose again and brought us the fruit of immortality.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

3. So: *The almond-tree shall flourish*. St Gregory[1] says that the almond tree blossoms earlier than other trees, and the Apostle says that Christ is *the first-born from the dead* [cf. Col 1.18], because he was the first to rise again. Note that a two-fold punishment was inflicted upon man, the death of the body and of the soul: "*On whatsoever day thou shalt eat, thou shalt surely die* [Gen3.17], in your soul, and will become subject to the necessity of death. So another translation says, *You will be mortal*."[2] There came our Samaritan, Jesus Christ, and *he poured wine and oil* [cf. Lk 10.34] into this double wound, because by the outpouring of his blood he destroyed the death of our soul. So Hosea 13 says:

*I will deliver them out of the hand of death. I will redeem them from death.*

*O death, I will be thy death! O hell, I will be thy bite!* [Hos 13.14]

He took part, and left part, like one who bites, and by his Resurrection he took away the necessity of death, because he gave the hope of rising again. *And death*, he said, *shall be no more* [cf. Apoc 21.4].

The Resurrection of Christ is represented in the oil, which floats upon every liquid. The joy the Apostles had at the Resurrection of Christ was greater than any joy they had had while he was still mortal. The glorification of bodies surpasses every other joy. So it is said:

*The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.* [Jn 20.20]

4. So there follows: *and the locust shall grow fat*. This refers to the primitive Church, which was fattened by the flower of the Lord's Resurrection, that is, it was made wonderfully happy and joyful. So Luke says, in his last chapter:

*But, while they yet believed not and wondered for joy, he said: Have you here anything to eat? And they offered him a piece of a broiled fish and a honeycomb*. [Lk 24.41-42]

The 'broiled fish' is the Redeemer who suffered, who was caught in the waters of the human race by the hook of death, and 'broiled' at the time of his Passion; and he, too, is the honeycomb for us in today's Resurrection. The honeycomb is in the wax, as the divinity is in the humanity. In this eating is signified that he takes them, in his body, to eternal rest, who, when they suffer trials for God's sake, do not depart from the joy of eternal sweetness. Those who are 'broiled' here, will there be satisfied with sweetness.

Note that the Lord appeared five times today: first to Mary Magdalene [Mk 16.9; cf. Jn 14.18]; second to her with others, running to tell the disciples [cf. Mt 28.9]; third to Peter [cf. Lk 23.34]; fourth to Cleophas and his companion [cf. Lk 24.14-31]; and fifthly to the disciples, behind locked doors, when those two had returned [cf. Lk 24.36-39; Jn 20.19-23]. See how the locust is fattened today with the almond flower! That is, how the infant Church is made joyful by the Resurrection of Christ.

When the sun grows hot, the locust jumps and flies; and in the same way the infant Church, when warmed by the fire of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, leapt and took flight in preaching throughout the whole world. As it is said:

*Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth.* [Ps 18.5]

And so, when the Church was fattened, *the caper was scattered*, a herb which clings to the rock, meaning the Synagogue which continued to cling to the law, which had been given written on stone, to show its hardness. *It is a stiff-necked people* [Ex 34.9], he says. The more the Church grew fat, the more the Synagogue was scattered.

This is **concordant** to II Kings 3:

*There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David:*

*David prospering and growing always stronger and stronger,*

*but the house of Saul decaying daily*. [2Kg(Sm) 3.1]

The house of David is the Church, the house of Saul (‘abuser’) is the Synagogue which abused the special gifts of God, accepted a bill of divorce, and departed from the bed of her lawful husband. How long the war between Church and Synagogue lasted, the Acts of the Apostles shows. The Church went forward, for, as Acts 2 says:

*The Lord increased daily together such as should be saved.* [Ac 2.47]

The Synagogue daily decreased; as Hosea says:

*Call his name, Not-my-people;*

*for you are not my people, and I will not be your God.* [Hos 1.9]

And:

*I will utterly forget them, and I will have mercy on the house of Juda,* [Hos 1.6-7]

meaning the Church. To him be honour and glory for ever. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

5. *The almond-tree shall flourish.* Let us see what is the moral significance of these three: the almond, the locust and the caper. Three things are noted in these three: the giving of alms, the consolation of the poor, and the destruction of avarice.

The giving of alms: *The almond-tree shall flourish*, that is, the alms-giver. Isaiah 17 says to him:

*In the morning thy seed shall flourish.* [Is 17.11]

The seed is alms, which should flourish in the hand of a Christian ‘in the morning’, early, before other worldly actions, as the almond-tree flowers before other trees.

Note that a flower has three characteristics: colour, scent, and hope of fruit. Colour

refreshes the sight, scent the sense of smell, and fruit the taste. So too with almsgiving, whose ‘colour’ (if I may so put it) refreshes the sight of the poor man, whose hand is upon the one giving. Thus Acts 3 says:

*Peter, with John, said to the lame man: Look upon us. But he looked earnestly upon them, hoping that he should receive something of them*. [Ac 3.4-5]

But we notice (not without sorrow) what prelates of the Church and great men of the world do, who, when the poor of Christ are at their door, crying out for a long time and begging alms with tearful voice, make them wait for a long time and, in the end, after they themselves have been well fed (and maybe sometimes drunk too), order them to be given some scraps from their table or kitchen left-overs. That is not what Job did, an almond-tree flowering early, as chapter 31 says:

*If I have denied to the poor what they have desired, and have made the eyes of the widow wait: If I have eaten my morsel alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof: for from my infancy mercy grew up with me*. [Job 31.16-18]

That refers to food; and the following refers to clothing:

*If I have despised him that was perishing for want of clothing, and the poor man that had no covering: If his sides have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep*. [Job 31.19-20]

The ‘scent’ of alms refreshes our neighbour, because from it he gets good example, and glorifies God; and the hope of receiving the fruit of eternal life refreshes the soul of the donor.

6. The consolation of the poor: *The locust shall grow fat.* Nahum 3 says:

*The locusts swarm on the hedges in the day of cold.* [Nah 3.17]

In the same way, poor folk, in the cold of poverty, literally sit in the hedgerows, begging alms from those that pass by- lepers, for instance, cast out by men. Alternatively, the ‘hedges’, full of sharp twigs and thorns, represent the piercing, sorrows and sicknesses of the poor. How great is their affliction! And so, how necessary their consolation. The locust grows fat from the flower, the poor man is consoled with alms. So Job 29 says:

*The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me:*

*and I comforted the heart of the widow*. [Job 29.13]

And the Lord says, in Isaiah 28:

*This is my rest. Refresh the weary, and this is my refreshing.*

*And they would not hear*. [Is 28.12]

And so they themselves, when they cry: *Lord, Lord, open to us* [Mt 25.11], will not be heard. Even now the Lord *stands* (in his poor) *at the door and knocks* [cf. Apoc 3.20], and it is opened to him when the poor man is succoured. The refreshing of the poor is the rest of Christ; he says:

*What you did to one of the least of mine*, etc. [cf. Mt 25.40]

And note the words 'grows fat'. Fat is composed of air and fire, and so it floats on water, because the air in it bears it up. So the consolation of the poor is derived from the 'air' of devotion (as to him who receives) and the fire of charity (as to you who give). Devotion arouses him to pray for you:

*Put thy alms into the heart of the poor, and it shall pray for thee,* [cf. Ecclus 29.15]

namely that your sins may be forgiven, your mind enlightened with grace, and eternal glory be given you.

7. The destruction of avarice: *and the caper shall be scattered,* whose root clings to the rock, representing the hardness of the avaricious man who will not alleviate the miseries of the poor. He is Nabal, whom I Kings 25 describes as *churlish and very bad* [1Kg (Sm) 25.3]. David's messengers said to him:

*We are come in a good day. Whatsoever thy hand shall find give to thy servants, and to thy son David*. [1Kg(Sm) 25.8]

He replied:

*Who is David? And what is the son of Isai? Servants are multiplied nowadays who flee from their masters. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and the flesh of my cattle which I have killed for my shearers, and give to men whom I know not whence they are?* [1Kg(Sm) 25.10-11]

This is the reply of the avaricious to the poor of Christ who beg for alms, to whom he gives nothing, cursing them and putting them to shame. And so, what follows happens to him:

*Nabal's heart died within him, and he became as a stone*. [1Kg(Sm) 25.37]

This happens to the miser when grace is withdrawn from him, and the instincts of kindness are lost.

Happy the man who ‘takes away his stony heart and takes a heart of flesh’ [cf. Ez 11.19], who sorrows and feels compunction for the miseries of the poor, so that his compassion is their consolation, and their consolation scatters his avarice. If someone has an unfruitful tree in his orchard, does he not root it up completely, and plant another fruit-tree instead? The barren tree is avarice. *Why cumbereth it the ground? Cut it down* [cf. Lk 13.7], uproot it and in its place plant alms which will bear you the fruit of eternal life. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

8. *The almond-tree shall flourish*. Three things are noted here, namely, honesty of conversation, sweetness of contemplation and extinction of lust. Let us look briefly at each.

Honesty of conversation: *The almond-tree shall flourish*. So Daniel 4 says:

*"I Nabuchodonosor was at rest in my house and flourishing in my palace*. [Dan 4.1]

What do we understand by the ‘house’, if not conscience? And what by the ‘palace’, if not security of conscience and confidence in that security? For a palace is a house too, though one cannot call any house whatever a palace. A palace is a strong house, magnificent and royal. If we should understand conscience by ‘house’, we should rightly understand security of conscience by ‘palace’. Therefore, he is ‘at rest’ in his house, whose conscience does not gnaw him. The fitting satisfaction for past evils, and a cautious and careful avoidance of present evils, makes a quiet conscience. He remains at rest in his house, whose conscience does not reproach him either for past or for present guilt. He was at rest in his house, who said truthfully:

*My heart doth not reprehend me in all my life*. [Job 27.6]

He was at rest in his house, who could say truthfully:

*I am not conscious to myself of anything.* [1Cor 4.4]

He was indeed at rest in his house all the time, and was flourishing in his palace, when he said:

*Our glory is this: the testimony of our conscience.* [2Cor 1.12]

Because the flower gives hope of fruit, the certain expectation of future goods is represented by the flower. Because the flower is the beginning of future fruit, we further rightly understand by the flower the beginning of what is to follow. Therefore, the flower represents either the certain expectation of reward, or the new acquisition of virtue. And

so he truly flourishes in his palace, who securely awaits the crown of glory, under the testimony of his good conscience."[3] And meanwhile, he tastes its sweetness in the leap or flight of contemplation. And so there follows:

9. The sweetness of contemplation: *The locust shall grow fat*, as in the warmth of the sun it jumps and flies in the air with what I may call a certain joyfulness. "So the holy soul, without a doubt, seems to go beyond the bounds of its native powers, as it shaken from itself by a certain inner rhythm of its dancing, as it is urged to go above itself in elevation of mind, as it is totally immersed in angelic visions. This is what the prophet means by:

*The mountains skipped like rams, and the hills like the lambs of the flock.* [Ps 113.4]

Who cannot see that it is above nature, or rather contrary to nature, for mountains and hills, like rams or lambs at play, to go leaping upwards; and earth to jump up from the earth, and balance itself on nothing? Is it not as if the earth were suspended from the earth, when a man is led above himself, he to whom the Lord’s voice said by way of curse: *Earth thou art, and to the earth thou shalt go* [Gen 3.19]?"[4] When, then, he is lifted up in such suspension of mind, he grows fat with the sweetness of contemplation.

So Canticles 8 says:

*Who is this that cometh up from the desert,*

*flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?* [Cant 8.5]

"The soul comes up from the desert in contemplation when she abandons all lower things and, passing even to heaven, immerses herself wholly by devotion in divine things alone. Then she truly overflows with delights, when she rejoices in the fulness of spiritual joy and grows fat with the abundance of inner sweetness bestowed on her from heaven and richly infused."[5] "She leans on her beloved when she puts no trust in her own powers, ascribes nothing to her own merits, but attributes everything to the grace of her Beloved."[6]

*He made us, and not we ourselves.* [Ps 99.3]

So Isaiah 26 says:

*Thou hast wrought all our works for us.* [Is 26.12]

And as to the usefulness of this fattening of the locust, hear what follows:

10. The extinction of lust: *the caper shall be scattered*. Because it has power over the kidneys, and because lust has control over those parts of the body, lust is denoted by

the caper. It is scattered when the soul is fattened by the aforesaid sweetness. So Daniel 10 says:

*I being left alone saw this great vision: and there remained no strength in me, and the appearance of my countenance was changed, and I fainted away, and retained no strength*. [Dan 10.8]

And Job 7:

*My soul chooseth hanging, and my bones death.*

*I have done with hope, and shall live no longer* [Job 7.15-16]

Behold how the caper is scattered! *Daniel, man of desires* [Dan 10.11], is the contemplative, who is left alone when he puts away all outward things, and hangs by the cord of love in the sweetness of contemplation; then, enlightened in mind, he sees a great vision which he himself cannot grasp, because it is seen *through a glass, darkly; not yet face to face* [cf. 1Cor 13.12]. When the soul is thus enlightened and thus suspended, the strength of the body fails, the appearance of the face grows pale, the flesh grows faint, and so he loses hope in the delight of the body and of the present time, in which he cares to live no longer, as he used to do; because *now he does not live himself, but the life of Christ lives in him* [cf. Gal 2.20]. Blessed is he for ever! Amen.

[ANAGOGICAL SERMON]

11. *The almond-tree shall flourish,* etc. In these three there are represented anagogically the resurrection of the body, the glorification of the soul, and the destruction of death. Let us look briefly at each.

The resurrection of the body: *The almond-tree shall flourish*. There is something similar in Job 14:

*A tree hath hope. If it be cut, it groweth green again, and the boughs thereof sprout. If its root be old in the earth, and its stock be dead in the dust: at the scent of water it shall spring, and bring forth leaves, as when it was first planted*. [Job 14.7-9]

The ‘tree’ is the human body, which, though it be cut down by death’s axe, and grows old in the earth, and rots and is reduced to dust: yet a man should have hope that it will grow green again, that is, that he will rise again; and that his limbs will ‘sprout’ and, at the scent of water (the kindness of the divine wisdom,) will ‘spring’ in glory, and ‘put forth leaves’ in immortality, just as when it was first planted in Paradise. "The first state of man in Paradise was to be able not to die; because of sin, his punishment was not to be able not to die; there remains this third state in that happiness, not to be able to die." Thus, *The almond-tree shall flourish*. So the Psalm says:

*My flesh hath flourished again: and with my will I will give praise to him.* [Ps 27.7]

Note that the flesh of man flourished in Paradise before sin; it ceased to flower after sin, but it will flourish again in the Resurrection of Christ, and will flourish to the full, flourish perfectly, in the general resurrection.

12. And then, *The locust shall grow fat*, the glorification of the soul. As it is said:

*I shall be satisfied when thy glory shall appear.* [Ps 16.15]

So the Psalm says:

*He fed them with the fat of wheat: and filled them with honey out of the rock.* [Ps 80.17]

The wheat and the rock are Christ, God and man. In the misery of the way, he is wheat to us, because he refreshes us; he is a rock, because he receives those who fly to him and defends those he receives. Thus:

*The rock is a refuge for the rabbits,* [Ps 103.18]

meaning converted sinners. In the glory of our homeland he will be to us the fat of wheat and honey from the rock, because he will feed us with the glory of his humanity and satisfy us with the sweetness of his divinity. So the last chapter of Isaiah says:

*You shall see and your heart shall rejoice* (the fatness of the locust)

*and your bones shall flourish like an herb* (the flower of the almond). [Is 66.14]

*You will see* the glory of his humanity, *and your heart shall rejoice* in the sweetness of his divinity.

13. And then, *The caper shall be scattered.* So the Apostle says in I Corinthians 15:

*When this corruptible hath put on incorruption, and this mortal hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying* (in Isaiah): *Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? Now the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who hath given us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord*. [1Cor 15.53-57]

Blessed is he for ever! Amen.

NOTES

[1] cf. GREGORY, *Moralia* XXXI,25,46; PL 76.599

[2] P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, liber Genesis*, 15; PL 198.1069

[3] RICHARD OF ST VICTOR, *De eruditione hominis interioris*, III,1; PL 196.1229

[4] RICHARD OF ST VICTOR, *Beniamin maior*, V,14; PL 196.186

[5] RICHARD OF ST VICTOR, *ibid*.; PL 196.185

[6] RICHARD OF ST VICTOR, *op. cit.* V,15; PL.196.187

[7] cf. P.LOMBARD, *Sententiae* II, *dist*. 19,1

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FESTIVAL SERMONS

## SAINT PHILIP AND SAINT JAMES

1. At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: *Let not your heart be troubled*. [Jn 14.1]

There are three things among the rest to be noted especially: the eternity of the heavenly mansion, the truth of faith, and the equality of Father and Son.

[THE ETERNITY OF THE HEAVENLY MANSION]

2. The eternity of the heavenly mansion: *Let not your heart be troubled*. Natural History says that the heart is the source and principle of the blood, and the first member that receives blood; it is the principle of movement regarding objects of desire or aversion, and the movements of every sense universally begin from it and return to it; its power extends to every member. *Let not your heart be troubled*, then, because if it is troubled, all your members will be troubled.

And note that hearts differ in greatness and smallness, softness and hardness. The hearts of animals which lack feeling are hard, while the hearts of sensitive animals are soft. Also, an animal which has a large heart is timid, while that which has a smaller one is more bold. And the effect of fear in such an animal is due to the lack of heat in its heart, which cannot fill it; for a small amount of heat in large hearts grows weaker, and so the blood grows colder. The hearts of hares, deer, asses, mice, and other fearful animals, are large; Just as a small fire warms a large house less than a small one, so it is with the heat in these. The 'large heart' is the proud heart; the 'small heart' is the humble heart. The 'soft heart' is the merciful and compassionate heart, which they have who feel sorrow or loss at another's need. The 'hard heart' is the avaricious heart which belongs to those who have no feeling. The 'large heart', the proud heart, is fearful, because the heat of love for God or neighbour in it is small and cold; and so it is quickly troubled, because it quickly fears. So that your heart may not be troubled, let it be humble, because therein will be a great warmth of love, and a great power of acting rightly.

Note, too, that the heart alone among the inner members can suffer no pain or great sickness. And this is right, because when the principle is corrupted, it can in no wise help the remaining members. The other members derive strength from the heart, not the heart from them. Therefore:

*Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid.* [Jn 14.27]

Among those things that most trouble the heart is the loss of something loved. Christ foretold his Passion to his disciples; because they loved him greatly, they feared to lose him, and so were able to be troubled. He consoled them, saying, : *Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid* because of the death of my flesh, because I am God, who will raise up the flesh. And so he added:

*You believe in God, believe also in me,* [Jn 14.1]

because I am God. Note that he said ‘in God’, not just ‘God’, or ‘that God (is)’. *The demons also believe* that God is, *and tremble* [Jas 2.19]. "He ‘believes God’ who simply believes his words, but does nothing good. But he believes ‘in God’ who loves him with all his heart and strives to adhere to his members."[1]

3. *You believe in God*. St Augustine’s Gloss says, "Lest they be afraid because of the death of a mere man, and be therefore troubled, he consoles them by telling them that he is also God. Lest they should still fear for themselves, that they might perish from him, he reassures them that after temptations they will abide in God’s house with Christ." So he adds:

*In my Father’s house there are many mansions.* [Jn 14.2]

Consider the pomegranate, all of whose seeds exist under a single skin, yet each seed has its own proper cell. So, in the glory of eternity, there will be one house, one penny, one and the same measure of life; yet an individual dwelling place for each, because in the same eternity there will be different dignities, one glory of the sun, another of the moon, another of the stars. "Yet in unequal glories there will be equal joy, because I shall rejoice over your glory just as I do over mine, and you over mine just as over your own."[2] For instance: Here we are, together. I have a rose in my hand. It is my rose, yet you are equally refreshed by its beauty and scent, as I am. So it will be in eternal life; my glory will be your refreshment and joy, and vice versa. In that clear glory there will be such a transparency of bodies that I can see myself in your face as in a mirror, and you yours in mine; and from this will arise an inexpressible love. So Augustine[3] says, "What will be that love, when we each see our own faces in each other’s, just as now we see one another’s faces?" In that brightness, all will be clear, nothing hidden or obscure to one another.

So Apocalypse 21 says:

*The city of Jerusalem was pure gold, like to clear glass.* [Apoc 21.18]

The heavenly Jerusalem is called ‘pure gold’, because of the brightness of the glorified

bodies; which will be like clear glass, because in clear glass whatever is inside appears clearly outside, and so in that vision of peace all the secrets of the heart will be open to all, and therefore they will burn towards one another with a furnace of unquenchable and inexpressible charity. At the moment we do not truly love one another as we should, because we hide ourselves in darkness and separate ourselves from one another in the secrets of the heart; and so *charity has grown cold and iniquity has abounded* [cf. Mt 24.12].

There follows: *If it were not so, I would have told you*. "The precise sense is, "If it were not so, I would have said that it was not so." That is, if these things were not there, I would not have concealed it from you, rather, I would have told you that they are not there. But you do know (you must understand) *because I go to prepare a place for you* [Jn 14.2]."[4] A father prepares a place for his son, and a bird a nest for its chicks. So Christ has prepared a place of rest in eternal life for us, and he has first prepared the way by which me may reach it. Blessed is he for ever. Amen.

[THE TRUTH OF THE FAITH]

4. The truth of the faith: *I am the way* [Jn 14.6], without error for those who seek. Isaiah 35 says of it:

*It shall be called the holy way: the unclean shall not pass over it. And this shall be unto you a straight way, so that fools shall not err therein*. [Is 35.8]

It is said that *he who would be wise, first let him become a fool, that he may be wise* [cf. 1Cor 3.18]. The wise fool does not err in the way of Christ, whose teaching was to despise temporal things and savour those of heaven.

Regarding this, in the book of Numbers 20, when Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom, he said:

*We beseech thee that we may have leave to pass through thy country. We will not go through the fields, nor through the vineyards: we will not drink the waters of thy wells: but we will go by the common highway, neither turning aside to the right hand, nor to the left, till we are past thy borders. We will go by the beaten way*. [Num 20.17,19]

The children of Israel are just men who pass through the land of Edom (‘bloody’), the world which is blood-stained with sins. They do not make a stop there, for, *Woe to the inhabitants of the earth* [cf. Apoc 8.13], they are travellers. Job 21 says of them:

*Ask any one of them that go by the way: and you shall perceive that he knoweth these things. Because the wicked man is reserved for the day of destruction: and he shall be brought to the day of wrath*. [Job 21.29-30]

They do not go through the accursed fields of worldly care, wherein Cain killed Abel ('possession', and 'struggle' of penitence); nor do they go through the vineyards of carnal desire and lust. As it is said, *Their vines are of the vineyards of Sodom* [Dt 32.32]. They do not drink from the well of the Samaritan woman, worldly cupidity, *of which he who drinks will thirst again* [cf. Jn 4.13]. Rather, they go by the common highway, the beaten way who says, *I am the way*. He was 'common' in word, 'beaten' in his scourging; 'common' in the preaching of the Apostles, 'beaten' in persecution; 'common', because available to all, 'beaten', because trodden underfoot by almost all. The Saracen denies, the Jew blasphemes, the heretic violates, the false Christian scourges by living badly. Only the just man walks humbly and faithfully, turning aside neither to the right hand of prosperity, to grow proud, nor to the left hand of adversity, to be cast down; until, beyond the border of death he enters the land of promise.

5. There follows: *The truth* [Jn 14.6], without falsehood to those who find it. Of this is said: *Truth is sprung out of the earth* [Ps 84.12]. Christ, the truth, is sprung from the virgin earth. The truth of his faith springs from mother Church; she goes ahead, so that this may follow: *To the righteous a light is risen up in darkness* [Ps 111.4]. He is the truth, of which III Esdras[5] 3 and 4 speak, where it is told that: 'three young men, that were of the guard that kept the king's body, wrote these things: the first, that wine is strong; the second, that the king is stronger; the third (*this was Zorobabel* [3Esd 4.13]) that women are the strongest, but that above all things truth is victorious' [cf. 3Esd 3.4,10-12].

*Great is the truth, and stronger than all things.*

*All the earth calleth upon the truth, and the heaven blesseth it.*

*The king is wicked, women are wicked, all the children of men are wicked,*

*and all their works are wicked; and there is no truth in them:*

*in their wickedness also they shall perish.*

*As for the truth, it endureth and is always strong;*

*it liveth and conquereth for evermore.*

*With her there is no accepting of persons or rewards;*

*but she doeth what is just to all, whether just or wicked.*

*and all men are blessed in her works.*

*Neither is there any wickedness in her judgement;*

*but she is the strength, kingdom, power and majesty of all ages.*

*Blessed be the God of truth. Amen*. [3Esd 4.35-40]

Strong is the wine of earthly cupidity, whereby worldly people are made drunk, and run from sin to sin. Stronger is the devil's pride, he *who is king over all the children of pride* [Job 41.25]. Stronger is the temptation of the flesh, and of lust. But the truth of Christ is stronger than all of things, and is victorious over all of these.

6. There follows: *And the life* [Jn 4.6], without death for those who remain in it. He says, *I live, and you will live* [Jn 14.19]. So, in his penultimate chapter, Isaiah says:

*As the days of a tree, so shall be the days of my people*. [Is 65.22]

The tree *planted near the running waters* [cf. Ps 1.3], the abundance of spiritual gifts, in the earth of the virgin's womb, is Jesus Christ whose days are eternal, because 'of his kingdom there will be no end' [Lk 1.33]; and the days of his chosen and saved people are eternal, because death shall be no more; and he, their God, *is not the God of the dead, but of the living* [Mk 12.27].

I am the way in example, the truth in promise, the life in reward; the way that does not err, the truth that does not deceive, the life that does not fail.

7. *No man cometh to the Father, but by me* [Jn 14.6]. So he says:

*I am the door. By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved; and he shall go in and go out, and shall find pastures*. [Jn 10.9]

"There was a certain gate of Jerusalem called the needle's eye, through which a camel could not pass, since it was low."[6] This doorway is the humble Christ, through which the proud man cannot enter, not the swollen miser; for he who would enter by this way must humble himself and put off his bulk, lest he become stuck in the doorway. He who enter by this door will be saved, if only he perseveres; and he will enter into the Church, to live here by faith, and to go out from this life to live for ever, where he may find the pastures of eternal joy. Amen.

[THE EQUALITY OF THE FATHER AND THE SON]

8. The equality of the Father and the Son: *Philip saith to him* [Jn 14.8]. His festival, and that of blessed James, is celebrated today. They live with Christ in the life of the mansions of the heavenly Jerusalem, who while they lived here followed Christ the Way, whose truth they preached to unbelievers, and who today entered through Christ himself the door into the pastures of eternal happiness.

*Lord*, he said, *shew us the Father; and it is enough for us* [Jn 14.8]. Because he had said that no-one comes to the Father except by him who is inseparably one with the Father, lest they should ask who is the Father, he showed that by knowing him the Father is known, which they did not as yet understand. He rebuked them, saying:

*If you had known me, you would without doubt have known my Father also; and from henceforth you shall know him. And you have seen him*. [Jn 14.7]

It is as though of two things exactly alike one might say, if you have seen one, you have seen the other. They had seen how the Son was most like, yet they had to be warned that they should understand the Father to be just so also, and not unlike. *You have known him already*, by knowing me, *and have seen him* with your heart, when you saw me who am like him in all things.

9. But there were others (of whom Philip was one) who, although they knew this the Son and that the Father, did not think that the Son was entirely similar, but that the Father was better; and so they did not know either the Father or the Son. Being in this mind, Philip said: *Shew us the Father, and it is enough for us*. There is something similar in Exodus 33, where Moses says to the Lord:

*Shew me thy glory. He answered: I will shew thee all good*. [Ex 33.18-19]

That is:

*Philip, he that seeth me seeth the Father also*, [Jn 14.9]

and so 'all good', from which all good comes, whatever at all is good. Whatever is good, meaning substantial good, extends its goodness to all things that exist. Whatever there is in heaven (as in the angels), whatever is on earth or under the earth, whatever is in the air, whatever is in water, that lives by intellect and reason, or moves itself, or has life and being: it is from that supreme good, the cause of all and fountain-goodness. To him be, therefore, all honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

10. *These are two sons of the splendour of oil who stand before the Lord of the whole earth*.

This text comes from Zechariah 4 [Zech 4.14]. There is something similar in Genesis 48:

*Joseph took his two sons, Manasses and Ephraim, and set out to go to his father Jacob. Jacob said, Who are these? He answered: They are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place. And he said: Bring them to me that I may bless them. And he blessed them, saying: God do to thee as to Ephraim and Manasses*. [cf. Gen 48.1,9,20]

May God do to us as to Philip and James, whom God gave to his Son Jesus Christ in Egypt (the world), in the land of his exile and poverty.

Philip means ‘mouth of a lamp’, and Ephraim ‘fruitful’. These two are well **concordant**. Philip made fruitful in good works those whom he enlightened with the word of preaching and the lamp of faith. And so it is read in his ‘Life’[7] that for twenty years he preached the Gospel insistently to the Gentiles throughout Syria, where he threw down a statue of Mars, beneath which was a most fierce dragon, and put the dragon to flight. He restored health to the sick, raised the dead, and baptised many thousands of men whom he had converted to the faith of Christ.

James means ‘supplanting the one who hastens’, and Manasses is ‘forgetful’. These two names are also harmonious. James, forgetting what lay behind, and temporal things, ‘supplanted’ (i.e. he *held his flesh under the foot* [cf. Gen 25.25]) in order to hasten what he desired. It is said that he was of great abstinence, not using baths or linen, meat or wine. Because of his outstanding holiness he was made Archbishop of Jerusalem by the Apostles, and called ‘the Just’. He is said to have been a brother of the Lord, much resembling him in features. When the Lord died, he vowed not to eat until Christ should rise, and so it is said that he appeared to him on the very day of the Resurrection, as the Apostle tells:

*He was seen by James and by five hundred brethren at once.* [1Cor 15.6-7]

While he was preaching Jesus Christ to a multitude of people in Jerusalem, he was thrown down from a pinnacle of the temple by the Jews, and being struck on the head with a fuller’s pole, his brains and blood spattered the ground and he passed away to the Lord on this day.

(11.) *These are two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies*, [Cant 4.5]

that is, the splendours of eternal joy. They are ‘sons of the splendour of oul’, the grace of the Holy Spirit with which they were anointed on the day of Pentecost. So the penultimate chapter of Deuteronomy says:

*Let Aser be blessed with children, let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil. His shoe shall be iron and brass*. [Dt 33.24-25]

Aser (meaning ‘riches’) is Christ, who is not merely ‘rich’, but riches themselves, granting abundantly to all, and never growing less in himself. He is blessed in these two children, wonderful and glorious. He was truly acceptable to his brethren (*Go, tell my brethren* [Mt 28.10], he said) who he loved so much and by whom he was loved so much. On the day of Pentecost he ‘dipped his foot’ (his Apostles, who were to carry him throughout the world, as a foot carries the body) in the oil of the Holy Spirit, so that they might more

easily bear the labour. The tired foot, when anointed, is refreshed for labour. The shoe of this foot was ‘iron’ (the power of miracles) and ‘brass (the resounding of words). The shoe with which the Apostles were equipped, so that they might safely *tread upon serpents and scorpions* [Lk 10.19], that is, on demons and wicked men, was their teaching. This had two characteristics- the power to work miracles, to penetrate hard hearts, and resounding preaching to instruct unbelievers.

There follows: *who stand before the Lord of the whole earth*. ‘Stand’ means here ‘obey’ or ‘minister’. These two Apostles obeyed Jesus Christ, the Lord of all the earth, in their being called and chosen, in their observance of his precepts. They ministered themselves to him, as a sweet-scented sacrifice. Now they stand before him with the angels, praising and blessing him. To him be praise and blessing for ever and ever. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

12. *These are two sons*. There is something similar in Genesis 44. Jacob said:

*You know that my wife bore me two*. [Gen 44.27]

His wife was Rachel, mother of Joseph and Benjamin. They represent the love of God and the love of neighbour. Jacob is any just man, and Rachel (whose name means ‘seeing the Lord’, or ‘sheep’) is the soul of the just man, which ‘sees God’ by faith, and is a ‘sheep’ by humility and simplicity. She bears two sons to Jacob, so that he may love God above all things, and his neighbour as himself. The first love is Joseph, the second is Benjamin. Let us look at each.

Joseph (meaning ‘increase’) is the love of God, for the more you love him, the more you receive increase from him and to him. So the Psalm says:

*Man shall come to a deep heart: and God shall be exalted*. [Ps 63.7-8]

The ‘deep heart’ is the heart of one who loves, desires, contemplates, despises things below. You come to such a heart with steps of devotion. God is exalted, not in himself, but in you. His exaltation is your intensification in love, your elevation in mind. Stretch yourself out, then, to touch him or grasp him (as much as is possible), who is above you, for he himself is reckoned to be on high.

But where does Joseph receive increase? Listen where! Genesis 41 says:

*God hath made me to grow in the land of my poverty*. [Gen 41.52]

This is what the Lord says:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. [Mt 5.3]

See how much he grows, who takes possession of the kingdom of heaven! Oh, how many there are today, who would gladly live a long time in strict poverty, if only they knew for certain that they would afterwards gain the kingdom of France or Spain! Today there is no-one who wants to live in the true poverty of Christ, so as to be able to have the kingdom of heaven. So Proverbs 3 says:

*The purchasing thereof is better than the merchandise of silver:*

*and her fruit* (the taste of contemplation) *than the chiefest and purest gold.*

*She is more precious than all riches:*

*and all the things that are desired are not to be compared with her*. [Prov 3.14-15]

The love of the divine majesty grows in the land of poverty, humility and lowliness. So the Baptist says:

*I must decrease, but he must increase*. [Jn 3.30]

When private love decreases in a man, divine love is increased.

13. Benjamin (meaning ‘son of the right hand’) was previously called Benoni (‘son of sorrow’). He represents love of neighbour, for whom you should be sorry. So that Benoni says himself, *Who is weak, and I am not weak?* [2Cor 11.29]; and in Romans 9:

*I have great sadness and continual sorrow in my heart for my brethren.* [Rom 9.2-3]

If you love me, you will be sorry for my sorrow. The sorrow of your heart is a sign of your love for me. A mother sorrows over her sick son, because she loves him; if she did not love, she would never sorrow. Alas! How little- or not at all- we sorrow for our neighbour’s sorrow! And what is the reason? To be sure, we do not love him. And so we should sorrow because we do not sorrow, and "Sorrow should be the medicine for sorrow."[8] Therefore let love of neighbour be first a ‘son of sorrow’, that afterwards it may be a ‘son of the right hand’, where we shall rejoice with him for ever. *If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him* [cf. Rom 8.17].

14. *These*, then, *are two sons*, and whoever has them is *blessed, and it shall be well with him* [cf. Ps 127.2]. Unhappy is he who has them not, who mourns with Jacob and says (as in Genesis 42):

*You have made me to be without children: Joseph is not living, Benjamin you will take away. All these evils are fallen upon me*. [Gen 42.36]

*As for me, I shall be desolate without children*. [Gen 43.14]

Natural History says that the eagle lays three eggs, but throws the third out of the nest, because it is too burdensome and enfeebling to feed three chicks. The three eggs are three loves- of God, of neighbour and of the world. The eagle (the just man) must throw the love of the world out of the nest of his conscience, so that he may be able to feed properly only two; for if he wanted to nurture the third, he would be burdened by bodily cares and enfeebled in virtue of mind, and so would become useless.

15. *These*, then, *are two sons*. Whose? *Of the splendour of oil*. Behold Rachel, who, as Genesis 29 says, was *well favoured and of a beautiful countenance* [Gen 29.17]. Behold the splendour of oil, the glory of the soul, the joy of conscience which rises above every other liquid, the joy of temporal things. Of this oil, the Lord said to Moses in Leviticus 24:

*Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee the purest and clearest oil of olives, to furnish the lamps continually, without the veil of the testimony*. [Lev 24.2-3]

The children of Israel are the just and contemplatives, who bring 'oil' (joy of conscience) which is 'purest' as to themselves, and 'clearest' as to their neighbour. It is derived not from nuts (the trifles of the world and the flesh), but from olives (works of mercy). From such oil they 'furnish' (by preparing and equipping) the 'lamps' of their bodily senses 'continually', which are outside the 'veil of testimony', of which the Apostle says:

*Our glory is this: the testimony of our conscience*. [2Cor 1.12]

The 'veil' is the secrecy of our minds, which we must place between ourselves and our neighbour. He cannot see beyond the veil, it is enough for him to see the lamps that have been made ready, so that by them the High Priest Jesus may be illuminated, he to whom all hearts are open, who enters beyond and within the veil, because the heart and its secrets are revealed to him.

There follows: *Who stand before the Lord of all the earth*. The love of God stands before him in humility and devotion of mind; the love of neighbour in compassion and succour. May Jesus Christ, who is blessed for ever, deign to bestow these two sons of love upon us. Amen.

NOTES

[1] cf. P.LOMBARD, *Sententiae*, III, *dist*. 23,4

[2] cf. P.LOMBARD, *Sententiae*, IV, *dist*. 49.3

[3] This quotation has not been traced in Augustine. Its source is unknown.

[4] P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, in Evangelia*, 154; PL 198.1619

[5] III Esdras was not included in the Canon of Scripture by the Council of Trent, and is not contained in the Douai translation. It was included in medieval Bibles, being in the Septuagint, and the translation given is based on that of the Authorised Version of the Apocrypha.

[6] P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, in Evangelia*, 101; PL 198.1588

[7] cf. ACTA SANCTORUM, *S. Philippi Apostoli vita* (where it gives 'Scythia' for 'Syria')

[8] cf. CATO, *Disticha*, IV,40,2

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE FINDING OF THE HOLY CROSS

1. At that time: *There was a man of the Pharisees, by name Nicodemus*. [Jn 3.1]

In this Gospel three things are noted: the regeneration of Baptism, the Ascension of Christ, and his Passion.

[THE REGENERATION OF BAPTISM]

2. The regeneration of Baptism: *There was a man of the Pharisees, by name Nicodemus*, who, believing, asserted that Christ had come from God, because of the signs which he had seen. He was not reborn, however, and so he came by night, not by day, because he was not yet enlightened by the heavenly light. Alternatively, he came by night, perhaps, because being a master in Israel he was embarrassed to learn in public; or because he was afraid of the Jews. This man, because he had carefully noted the evident signs, asked more fully about the mysteries of the faith, and so merited to be taught about the second birth and entry into the kingdom of heaven, about the deity of Christ and his two-fold birth, about his Passion, Resurrection and Ascension, and many other matters. Note that Nicodemus, whose name means 'outflow of earthliness' is the type of those who believe perfectly, but do not yet have the light of perfect works, fearing carnal opinion and actions, such as the attacks of the unbelieving Jews. They have faith alone, and enjoy converse with Christ, but they do not have the confidence that comes from good works.

This is like what Natural History teaches about the owl. It has weak vision at noon-day, but at night it sees more clearly, and is then stronger, and flies with greater security. During the day other birds fly around it and pluck out its feathers, and because of this fowlers catch with it many other birds. The owl gets its name from its call, and it represents the Christian who is such in name only (for 'christian' comes from 'Christ'), but does not have the reality of the name, the humility and charity of Christ, and so is called 'an empty vessel with a label on'. He does not see clearly in the day, because he lacks the light of good works, but in the night he sees very keenly, because *the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light*. [Lk 16.8]. As it is said:

*They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge*. [Jer 4.22]

3. There follows:

*Jesus answered and said to him: Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again… of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* [Jn 3.3,5]

"In the Old Testament, the way of swearing by God was to say, *As the Lord lives!* [cf. 1Kg (Sm) 26.10]. In the New Testament, it is *Amen, I say*. And while in the other Evangelists it is said simply, in John alone it is redoubled, according to the saying: *Let your speech be: Yea, yea* [Mt 5.37], as though to say, I speak the truth in both heart and mouth."[1] The Gloss says here, "The second birth of which Jesus teaches is spiritual, being from God and the Church, for life. But he understood only carnal birth, which is from Adam and Eve, for death. But just as he says that carnal birth cannot be repeated, so spiritual birth (whoever it is conferred by) cannot be repeated. They are born of the seed of the true Abraham (that is, Christ) whether by the free woman or by the servant."

*By water and the Holy Spirit*, he says. Fire, a pot, and food are three things. The fire is under the pot, the food is in the pot. The fire does not actually touch the food, and yet it heats it, purifies it and cooks it. The fire is the Holy Spirit, the human body is as it were a pot, and the soul is like food. Just as food is cooked by the heat of the fire through the means of the pot, so the Baptism of water, heated by the Holy Spirit, as it touches the body outwardly, purifies the soul from all its inner sins. The Holy Spirit came down at the river Jordan upon Christ who was baptised. He comes down daily in the Baptismal font upon any Christian, and by his power he is made a child of grace, from a child of wrath. So Christ heard, for his own sake and for those belonging to him: *This is my beloved Son* [Mt 3.17].

4. Morally. The Baptism of water and the Holy Spirit is Penance, of the spirit of contrition and the water of tearful confession; so that he who has lost his first innocence and grace by mortal sin, may be able to recover it by the power of this second rite. "This is the second plank after shipwreck."[2] Eliseus spoke of this baptism to Naaman the Syrian, rich but leprous, in IV Kings 5:

*Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and thy flesh shall recover health, and thou shalt be clean*. [4(2)Kg 5.10]

Naaman means ‘graceful’, Syrian is ‘sublime’, Jordan is ‘river of judgement’. The sinner is outwardly beautiful, and inwardly (in his soul) a leper; ‘sublime’ (i.e. proud) above, a rich man below. If he wants to recover his health, he must come to the river of judgement, that is, he must approach confession with tears, where he may judge himself, and condemn his own evil deeds, and this ‘seven times’.

Regarding this, the Apostle says in II Corinthians 7:

*Behold, this self-same thing, that you were made sorrowful according to God, how great*

*carefulness it worketh in you; yea defence, yea indignation, yea fear, yea desire, yea zeal, yea revenge*. [2Cor 7.11]

‘Sorrowful’ is as it were ‘broken’; this sorrow is contrition of heart in confession. This sorrow brings about the carefulness of satisfaction in the sinner; as Micah 4 says:

*Be in pain and labour, O daughter of Sion, as a woman that bringeth forth*. [Mic 4.10]

Compare the words: *Martha was busy with much serving* [Lk 10.40]. ‘Labour’ and ‘busy’ both mean ‘doing enough’ or ‘satisfying’.

*Yea defence*, that is, self-accusation. He makes a good defence of himself before the judge of the heavenly court, when he accuses himself well before the judge of the Church. Job 6 says:

*I will not spare my mouth, I will speak in the affliction of my spirit*. [Job 7.11]

He ‘spares his mouth’ when he tries to minimise or gloss over his sins in confession; he does not speak in affliction of spirit, who confesses dryly and as it were frivolously.

*Yea indignation*, against himself, not against fate or his neighbour. This is what Job did (chapter 13):

*I tear my flesh with my teeth, and carry my soul in my hands.*

*Although he should kill me, I will trust in him.*

*But yet I will reprove my ways in his sight; and he shall be my saviour*. [Job 13.14-16]

It is a sign of great indignation, when someone tears their own flesh with their teeth. He ‘tears his flesh with his teeth’ who rebukes his carnal deeds with his own condemnations. Such a one ‘carries his soul in his hands’, ready to give it back to God at whatever hour he asks for it. Alternatively, the ‘soul’ is the life of the body- where the soul is, life is. ‘Life in one’s hands’ is charity, which is the soul of faith expressed in works. He who carries his soul like this, even though God afflicts him and kills him with temptation and persecution: nevertheless he trusts in him, knowing that he receives every son whom he reproves. The more he humbles himself, he reproves his ‘ways’, his actions, saying:

*I have not received what I deserved*. [Job 33.27]

*Yea fear*, lest he fall into the same or similar plight. *See how you walk circumspectly* [Eph 5.15], he says. Natural History says that the chameleon (the name means ‘earth lion’) is extremely thin, because it has little blood. It is very timid, and because of its timidity it changes its colour into many colours, because its fear is increased by its lack

of blood and lessening of heat. This is almost literally true of the humble and contrite penitent! He may be called ‘earth lion’, because like a lion he subdues and treads down the earth of his flesh. He is thin and bloodless through much abstinence. He may be called ‘very timid’, because having experienced danger, he is afraid that a hook is hidden in every food. Or else, he fears because he does not see in himself sufficient blood of contrition, or heat of divine love, that he may safely frequent the danger or occasion of sin. He who does not have these two things, I pray and advise him to be afraid of dangerous placers, and, by fearing them, flee from them.

*Yea desire*; of which was said: *With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you* [Lk 22.15]

He should always desire to pass, day by day, to a greater perfection, and at length from the world to the Father.

*Yea zeal*, to imitate. *Be zealous for the better gifts* [1Cor 12.31], he says. Zeal may be envious, or it may be desire to imitate. To ‘emulate’ is to ‘mill out’. He who desires to imitate another’s virtues must needs carefully grind out his own life in the mill of conscience, and, when he has done so, show others an example that they may imitate. Alternatively, the zealous man is one who extracts the grain of virtue from another’s sack, and puts it into the mill of his own heart, to grind it carefully into fine flour, from which to make bread, which first he eats himself, and then gives to others.

*Yea revenge*, of which Luke 18 says: *A certain widow cried to the judge: Avenge me of my adversary. And he would not for a long time*. [Lk 18.3-4]. The ‘widow’ is the soul, widowed from her spouse, the Holy Spirit, to whom she was joined in Baptism, after mortal sin. She, troubled because of her sin, cries to the judge (who should judge himself), *Avenge me of my adversary*, this body. And because the sinner fears neither God, ‘whose fear is not before his eyes’ [cf. Ps 35.2], nor has respect for man, because ‘he has a harlot’s forehead, he would not blush’ [cf. Jer 3.3], he is unwilling to vindicate the widow (that is, to do penance) for a long time, because he has many sins and has been a long time in them. But in the end, at the shouting and gnawing of conscience, he avenges the widow: he judges himself, and condemns the adversary (his own body) in the court of penitence, and shuts it up, condemned, in the prison of penance, until it gives full satisfaction to the widow. Amen.

[CHRIST’S ASCENSION]

5. Christ’s Ascension: *No man hath ascended* [Jn 3.13]. Because we intend to speak more fully about the Lord’s Ascension in a following sermon, we will here treat the matter briefly.

‘Heaven’ means the height of the divinity, regarding which Lucifer said (in Isaiah 14):

*I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne to the north,*

*and I will be like the most High*. [cf. Is 14.13-14]

Since Lucifer was established in the empyrean, there was no higher heaven to which he might ascend, but he meant by heaven the height of the divinity, to which he desired to ascend so as to be like to the most High. Here, too, heaven can be understood suitably in the same sense in which it was taken there. No man, not any at all, however holy, even if he was sanctified from the womb, has gone up to the sublimity of the Godhead, so as to be God; apart from him who came down from heaven (the height of the divinity) in order to be man- that is, *the Son of man, who is in heaven* [cf. Jn 3.13], remaining God. He did not come down from heaven in such wise that he did not remain in heaven, because he did not become man in such wise that he ceased to be God, but he was 'both rich and poor together' [Ps 48.3], God and man; begotten of God before all ages, man born of man in this world. Something similar is found in the Psalm, too:

*His going out is from the end of heaven*, etc. [Ps 18.7]

Note that it is one thing to ascend, another to be carried up. He who 'ascends', goes up by his own power; he who is carried up, is carried by another's power. Christ ascended into heaven by his own power, all others were carried up by the ministry of angels. Thus it is said that 'Enoch was translated' [cf. Ecclus 44.16], that 'Elias was taken up in a chariot of fire' [Ecclus 48.9], and as is sung by the Church, "Michael comes with a multitude of angels, to lead souls into the paradise of rejoicing."[3]

6. Morally. 'Heaven' is the height of contemplation, or the excellence of holy conversation. Deuteronomy 11 says of it:

*The land which thou goest to possess is not like the land of Egypt, from whence thou camest out: where, when the seed is sown, waters brought in to water it after the manner of gardens. But it is a land of hills and plains, expecting rain from heaven, and the Lord thy God doth always visit it: and his eyes are on it from the beginning of the year unto the end thereof*. [Dt 11.10,11]

The land of Egypt is the world or the flesh, whose waters are riches and pleasures, with which it is watered like a garden (meaning worldly pomp or carnal lust). Isaiah 1 says of it:

*When you shall be as an oak with the leaves falling off*

*and as a garden without water*. [Is 1.30]

In the hour of death, the leaves of riches fall off, and the water of pleasure dries up, and then the unhappy sinner is left naked and dry. The land of penitence is not like that, to which he who goes out from the land of Egypt should enter, to possess it. Penitence is 'hilly', because it is laborious to enter, but 'of plains', because wide and flat as one goes

on. Any religious life is ‘hilly’ to begin with, because its ascent is difficult, especially to those without experience, but ‘plain’ as it broadens out in the course of time. This land- not of Egypt but of heaven, that is, of the height of contemplation or holy conversation- expects the rain of devotion, consolation and tears of compunction, with which the Lord visits it and waters it.

And note the word ‘expects’, referring to the great desire of the penitent, or of religious life, which should always expect consolation either from contemplation, or from preaching, or from the company of a just man. Upon this land are the eyes of the Lord, the regard of divine grace from the beginning of grace until the last dusty end. In this heaven is the son of man, a worm, a humble person, who reckons himself a worm and a son of a worm. As Job 25 says:

*Man is rottenness, and the son of man a worm,* [Job 25.6]

meaning rottenness from rottenness. The humble man reckons himself ‘rottenness’, and so says with David (in I Kings 24):

*After whom dost thou come out, O king of Israel? After whom dost thou pursue?*

*After a dead dog? After a flea?* [1Kg(Sm) 24.15]

This man is such that he is in the aforesaid heaven by purity of mind; comes down from heaven in compassion for his neighbour, and ascends into heaven in elevation of mind: and no other, because no proud man does:

*God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble* [Jas 4.6; 1Pt 5.5]. Amen.

[HIS PASSION]

7. His Passion: *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert* [Jn 3.14]. This is what we read in the book of Numbers 21: *The Lord sent among the people fiery serpents* [Num 21.6], because they murmured. A little later, the Lord said to Moses:

*Make a brazen serpent, and set it up for a sign:*

*whosoever being struck shall look on it, shall live*. [Num 21.8]

The brazen serpent is Christ, God and man. Bronze, which does not rust away even in a very great period of time, is his divinity; the serpent represents his humanity, which was lifted up on the tree of the Cross as a sign of our salvation. Let us lift up our eyes, then, and *let us look on Jesus, the author of salvation* [cf. Heb 12.2]. Let us consider our Lord hanging on the Cross, fixed with nails. But, alas! As Moses says in Deuteronomy 28:

*Thy life shall be hanging before thee; neither shall thou trust thy life.* [Dt 28.66]

He does not say ‘living’, but ‘hanging’. What is dearer to a man than his life? The life of the body is the soul, the life of the soul is Christ. Well then, your life is hanging: why do you not suffer and feel compassion?

If he is your life (as indeed he is), how can you contain yourself further, ‘ready, with Peter and Thomas, even to go to prison and undergo death together with him’ [cf. Lk 22.33]? He hangs before you, so as to invite your compassion for him, as it says in Lamentations 1:

*O all ye that pass by the way, attend,*

*and see if there is any sorrow like to my sorrow.* [Lam 1.12]

Truly, there is no sorrow like his sorrow! Those he redeemed with such great sorrow, will he so easily let slip? His Passion was sufficient for the redemption of all. But behold! Almost all are heading for damnation. What sorrow is as great as his? Almost no-one attends or recognises it. And therefore we should greatly fear lest he say (as he did in the beginning), *It repenteth me that I have made them* [Gen 6.7], as though to say now, "It repenteth me that I have redeemed them." If someone had laboured hard all the year in his field or vineyard, and got no fruit from it, would he not be sorry? Would he not regret having laboured? He himself says in Isaiah 5:

*What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it? Was it that I looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it hath brought forth wild grapes?* [Is 5.4]

What sorrow!

*I looked that he should do judgement* (penance), *and behold, iniquity:*

*and to do justice* (to his neighbour)*, and, behold, a cry!* [Is 5.7]

See what fruit the cursed vine, that is to be torn up by the roots and burned on the fire, bears its owner. They do not merely act wickedly before God, but they cry out openly before their neighbour- that is, they sin publicly.

So, *thy life shall be hanging before thee*, as you look at yourself in it as in a mirror. There you can recognise how mortal were your wounds, that no medicine could cure, except the blood of the Son of God. If you have looked well, you will have been able to recognise how precious and excellent you are, for whom such priceless blood was shed. No man can better understand his own worth, than in the mirror of the Cross, which shows you how you should bring low your pride, mortify your unruly flesh, pray to the

Father for those who persecute you, and commend your spirit into his hands. Yet there happens to us as James 1 says:

*If a man be hearer of the word and not a doer, he shall be compared to a man beholding his own countenance in glass. For he beheld himself and went his way and presently forgot what manner of man he was*, [Jas 1.23-24]

as he saw himself to be there. So we, too, gaze at the Crucified, in whom we see the image of our redemption, and in thinking of him for a little while (a very little while), perhaps we sorrow. But straightaway, as soon as we turn our eyes, we are changed in heart and turn to laughter. But if we feel the bites of the fiery serpents (the temptations of the devil and the wounds of our sins), let is fix our eyes on the brazen serpent, that we may live.

But *neither shall thou trust thy life*, he says, that tells you that *whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting* [Jn 3.15]. To see and to believe are the same thing, for as much as you believe, so much you see. Trust your life, then, with a living faith, that you may live with Life himself for ever and ever. Amen.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

8. *The tree hath brought forth its fruit: the fig-tree and the vine have yielded their strength*.

This text comes from Joel 2 [Joel 2.22]. Of this tree, Wisdom 10 says:

*When water destroyed the earth, Wisdom healed it again, directing the course of the just by contemptible wood*. [Wisd 10.4]

The ‘contemptible wood’ is the wood of the Cross, for:

*Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.* [Gal 3.13; cf. Dt 21.23]

There Christ, the Wisdom of God the Father, was despised and derided:

*Vah, thou that destroyest the temple;* [Mt 27.40]

and:

*If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross.* [Mt 27.42]

In this wood and by this wood the world has been saved, which was formerly destroyed by the waters of the Flood.

We read in the ‘History of the Greeks’[4] that when Adam grew infirm, he sent his son Seth to seek medicine for him. When he came near Paradise, he told the angel who stood guard outside about his father’s sickness. He broke off a branch of the tree whose fruit Adam had eaten against the command, and gave it to Seth, saying, "When this branch bears fruit, your father will be well." This seems to be expressed in the Preface[5] which says, "That whence death rose, life should rise again." But when Seth returned, he found his father dead and buried, and planted the branch at his head, which grew into a great tree. When (as some say[6]) a long time afterwards the Queen of Saba came to the ‘house of the Forest’ [cf. 3(1)Kg 7.2], she saw it, and when she had returned home she wrote to Solomon (having feared to tell him at the time) that she had seen a certain tree in the house of the Forest, upon which would be hung one for whose death the Jews would perish and their place and race be destroyed. In fear of this, Solomon hid it in the deepest bowels of the earth, where afterwards the Probatic pool was made [cf. Jn 5.2]. When Christ’s time drew near, the wood floated up, as though to foretell Christ, and from then on the water began to be moved by the descent of an angel. On Good Friday, when the Jews were looking for some wood upon which to nail the Saviour, they found this wood and took it to Calvary, and crucified Christ upon it. Thus, *the tree hath brought forth its fruit*, by which Adam was healed and saved. This wood was hidden again in the bowels of the earth after the death of Christ, and a long time afterwards it was found, on this day, by blessed Helena, the mother of Constantine. Therefore today’s festival is called the Finding of the Holy Cross. And so, *the tree hath brought forth its fruit*.

Regarding this, the Bride says in Canticles 2:

*I sat down under his shadow, whom I desired: and his fruit was sweet to my palate*. [Cant 2.3]

And Lamentations 4 says:

*The breath of our mouth, Christ the Lord, is taken in our sins:*

*to whom we said: Under thy shadow we shall live among the Gentiles*. [Lam 4.20]

The heat of the sun is the devil’s suggestion or the temptation of the flesh. When these afflict a man, he should run immediately to the shade of the precious tree and sit there, humble himself there, because there is coolness and a particular remedy for temptation. The devil, who lost the human race upon the Cross, greatly fears to approach the Cross. The prophet says:

*I opened my mouth and drew breath*. [Ps 118.131]

He who opens his mouth in confession, receives the breath of grace, which is the life of the soul. Christ our Lord is the ‘breath of our mouth’, because ‘in him we live and move and are’ [Ac 17.28]. We believe in him with our heart and confess him with our mouth.

He was taken, bound and crucified for our sins. See the breath and sweet fruit of our throat! And if he is so sweet in the confession of his name, and in the taste of contemplation, what will he be in the fruition of his majesty? And if he is so sweet in our misery, what do you think he will be in glory? And we live in his shadow among the Gentiles (various temptations), how gloriously shall we live in the light of his truth?

9. There follows: *The fig-tree and the vine have yielded their strength*. See what advantage we have derived from the wood of the Cross: the fig-tree (the sweetness of the Lord’s Resurrection) and the vine of sevenfold grace. What great riches and delights! Here the fig-tree, there the ‘new wine*, put in new skins* [cf. Lk 5.38], and ourselves in the midst! This feast of the Cross comes between Easter and Pentecost. We, who are redeemed by the wood of the Cross, stretch out our hands to both, and are satisfied from both, because the two of them yield us their strength. There is scarcely any fruit sweeter than the fig; and what is sweeter than the clarity, agility, subtlety and immortality of the glorified body? This sweetness gives man strength against the false sweetness of the world and the flesh. The wine of the Holy Spirit, *which may cheer the heart of man* [cf. Ps 103.15], gives strength that man may rejoice in troubles, and not grow faint. May he who is blessed for ever deign to grant us this strength. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

10. *The tree hath brought forth its fruit*. Let us see the moral significance of these three, the tree, the fig and the vine.

Note that thee were three ‘woods’ in Paradise, that is, three kinds of tree. The first, those of which Adam might eat; the second, the tree of life; the third, that of the knowledge of good and evil. Genesis 2 says of them:

*The Lord God brought forth of the ground all manner of trees, fair to behold and pleasant to eat of: the tree of life also in the midst of paradise, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil*. [Gen 2.9]

The first represents honesty of conversation, the second purity of conscience, the third subtlety of judgement. Honest conversation is beautiful and sweet, having nothing disgraceful in it action, nothing out of place in its words, nothing unbecoming in gesture or movement; thus it refreshes our neighbours sight with the colour of its beauty, and delights the palate of his mind. So Canticles 6 says:

*Thou art beautiful, O my love, sweet and comely as Jerusalem*, [Cant 6.3]

(which means ‘peaceful’, and represents honest conversation which pacifies and delights all the members).

Again, purity of conscience is the ‘tree of life’, of which Proverbs 3 says:

*She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her:*

*and he that shall retain her is blessed*. [Prov 3.18]

What a paradise! (The word means the place 'situated beside God', from '*para'*, 'beside'). What is nearer to God than a pure conscience? A bride beside her bridegroom? Job says:

*Set me beside thee: and let any man's hand fight against me*. [Job 17.3]

Again, discretion is the 'tree of the knowledge of god and evil'. This is the true knowledge, the only knowledge worthy of the name, that alone makes knowledgeable, 'to know how to discern between clean and unclean' [cf. Lev 10.10], the leprous and the non-leprous, the vile and the precious, the clear and the obscure, virtue and vice. 'Discretion' is the analysis of any matter, and the consideration of its implications. Of each of these three trees it is possible to understand the words, *The tree hath brought forth its fruit*. The tree of honest conversation brings forth the fruit of edification, in your neighbour. The tree of a pure conscience brings forth the fruit of contemplation, in God. The tree of discretion brings forth the fruit of goodness in you yourself.

11. There follows: *The fig-tree*, renowned for its fecundity, more fertile than other trees, in that it bears fruit two or three times a year, and as soon as one ripens another is formed. The fig-tree is fraternal charity, more fruitful than the other virtues, which brings back the stray, forgives the one who offends, feeds the hungry. Even as it performs one work of mercy, it thinks of another that it may perform. *And the vine*, representing compunction of tears. So Genesis 49 says:

*Juda tying his foal to the vineyard, and his ass, O my son, to the vine.*

*He shall wash his robe in wine, and his garment in the blood of the grape.* [Gen 49.11]

The 'ass' is the flesh, the 'foal' the inclinations of the flesh. Juda (the penitent) binds both his flesh and its inclinations, lest it run wild and wanton, to the 'vineyard' or 'vine', compunction of mind. In it he 'washes his robe' (cleanses his conscience) and his 'garments' (his outward actions). As it is said:

*Thou hast made us drink the wine of sorrow.* [Ps 59.5]

Of these two (the vine and the fig-tree), I Maccabees 14 says:

*Simon made peace in the land, and Israel rejoiced with great joy. And every man sat under his vine and under his fig-tree, and there was none to make them afraid*. [1Mac 14.11-12]

Simon (‘obedient’, or ‘bearing sorrow’) is Christ, who was obedient to the Father and bore the sorrow of death. As he said, *My soul is sorrowful even unto death* [Mt 26.38]. When he makes peace in the land (our flesh), treading down the insults of the devil and the tumult of the flesh, Israel (our spirit) rejoices with great joy. Then everyone rests under the vine of inner compunction and the fig-tree of fraternal charity. These two give their strength both to you and your neighbour. May he grant us this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, in Evangelia*, 39; PL 198.1560

[2] cf. JEROME, *Epistle* 130, *to Demetrius*, 9; PL 22.1115

[3] ROMAN BREVIARY, Responsory 5 at Matins, Feast of St Michael.

[4] The ‘History of the Greeks’ seems to have been the name of an apocryphal Gospel current in St Antony’s time.

[5] ROMAN MISSAL, Preface of the Cross.

[6] cf. P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, liber III Regum*, 26; PL 198.1370; and *in Evangelia*, 81; PL 198.1579

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE LITANIES

1. At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: *Which of you shall have a friend*. [Lk 11.5]

In this Gospel three things are noted: the asking for bread, the persistence of prayer, and the love of a father for his son.

[THE ASKING FOR BREAD]

2. The asking for bread: *Which of you shall have a friend*. Let us see what is the meaning of these six: the friend, the night, the three loaves, the friend from the journey, the door, the children.

The friend, 'guardian of the soul', is Jesus Christ. Unless he keep the soul, *he labours in vain who keeps it* [cf. Ps 126.1]. Ecclesiasticus 6 says of him:

*A faithful friend is a strong defence: and he that hath found him hath found a treasure. Nothing can be compared to a faithful friend: and no weight of gold and silver is able to countervail the goodness of his fidelity*. [Ecclus 6.14-15]

And chapter 9:

*Forsake not an old friend: for the new will not be like to him*. [Ecclus 9.14]

(This means the devil, who loves novelty). Our true friend is Jesus Christ, who loved us so much that he delivered his life for us [cf. Gal 2.20]. O how faithful would be your friend, if, when you were at the point of death, he offered himself for you, and freely took upon himself your sickness and death!

Natural History says that the curlew, a totally white bird, and the inside of whose eyes is a cure for blindness, fixes its gaze upon a sick person if he is destined to live, and this is an indication of his state of health. The bird then approaches the face of the sick person and draws out his illness, taking it into itself. Then it flies into the air, and totally consumes it in the burning rays of the sun. It is the same with Christ our friend, who is wholly white, because he is clean from all sin, and the blood flowing from the wound in

his side has cured the blindness of our souls, which could not see clearly before. It is said that blood taken from a dove's side removes a blemish from the eye. He gazed fixedly upon the sick human race with the eyes of his mercy, and this was a sign of our salvation. He came to us, took our infirmity, mounted the Cross, and their consumed our sins in the burning heat of the Passion. Truly, he was our friend, of whom it is said: *Which of you shall have a friend and shall go to him at midnight* [Lk 11.5].

The night which impedes the eyes is tribulation or temptation, which impede the eyes of reason. Job 3 says of it:

*Let that night be solitary, and not worthy of praise*. [Job 3.7]

The night of temptation is 'solitary' when it finds no consent in man; it is 'not worthy of praise' when man does not favour or fawn on it. A person associates himself with temptation and praises it, who receives it when it comes, and having received it, toys with it in his mind. You should go to Christ your friend in this night, and say to him: *Friend, lend me three loaves* [Lk 11.5].

The 'three loaves' are the three-fold grace of compunction. The first is the remembrance of one's own frailty and sin; the second is the consideration of our present exile; the third is the contemplation of the Creator. He asks for the loan of these three loaves. A loan is something that must be repaid. Whatever we have of grace, we receive from God and must return to him.

*Not to us, O Lord, not to us: but to thy name give glory.* [Ps 113A.1]

You are poor, and have not the bread of compunction: ask your friend to lend it to you, so that you may return to him what you have received from him.

*Because*, he says, *a friend of mine is come off his journey to me,*

*and I have not what to set before him*. [Lk 11.6]

The friend who has come from a journey is the mind which departs from us as often as it wanders off to look for temporal things. It returns when it thinks of higher things and desires to be refreshed with heavenly food. He has nothing to set before it, because a benighted soul sighing for God cannot think, speak or gaze on anything but him. Only the joy of the Trinity, which is also represented by the three-fold bread, and which the soul begins to recognise again and strive to see more fully and attain.

3. There follows: *And he from within should answer and say:*

*Trouble me not; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed*. [Lk 11.7]

He, our friend, is ‘within’, and we poor wretches are still standing outside, because we are cast out from his countenance in our present miserable exile. We stand outside, and have to cry out: *Friend, lend me three loaves*. He asks the loan of three loaves, suffering many inconveniences. See: he stands outside, in the middle of the night and in such need of bread! At a closed door he cries out, and hears these words: *Trouble me not* (that is, I must not be disturbed by your prayers), because *the door is shut*.

There is something similar in Deuteronomy 28:

*Be the heaven, that is over thee of brass, and the ground thou treadest on of iron. The Lord give thee dust for rain upon thy land: and let ashes come down from heaven upon thee, till thou be consumed*. [Dt 28.23-24]

The door is shut, the heavens are brass, when the ray of divine grace does not illuminate the human mind, and his prayer does not penetrate the heaven of brass. It is said:

*Thou hast set a cloud, that our prayer may not pass through.* [Lam 3.44]

If the sky were brass, the sun would not shine and the rain would not fall; and men would remain in darkness and perish in drought. So, when the door or sky of heavenly grace is shut, the sinner remains in darkness of conscience, and lacks the rain of compunction. The ‘ground he treads on’ (the active life), and over which he sweats, becomes ‘of iron’, and from it he can receive no fruit of consolation, only coldness and hardness of heart. Iron is cold and hard. The land is given dust instead of rain, when, instead of an abundance of tears, the wretched soul is given the dust of the most trivial thoughts, which dry it up. Ashes come down on it, when it looks for mortal and fallen things which beat it and afflict it. See how great is the sorrow and anguish! There is no sweetness in the contemplative life, no comfort in the active life, blindness of mind in prayer, aimless wandering among temporalities.

But should he despair? Should he give up praying? Of course not! Even if the door of heavenly grace is shut, either because of our sins or to make us more fervent to pray and beseech. Even if the ‘children’ (the angelic spirits through whom God infuses his gifts of grace, and gives comfort in tribulation) are with him ‘in bed’, that is, in eternal rest, and will not come out to minister to us. The Apostle writes to the Hebrews:

*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?* [Heb 1.14]

Even so, should one cease to ask for bread? He says, *I cannot rise and give thee*. [Lk 11.7]; but the Gloss says here, "He does not take away the hope of praying, he more vehemently inflames the desire to pray, having shown the difficulty of gaining what one wants."

*Yet, if he shall continue knocking, I say to you*, etc. [Lk 11.8]. The Gloss says, "If a human friend rises and gives, not from friendship but compelled by weariness, how much more will God give, who without weariness gives abundantly what is asked? Lest our mind, converted from the vanity of error, waste away any longer for want of its spiritual desire, we ask for bread, we ask our friend to give us, we knock at the door where what we cannot see is kept. He gives us great hope, who does not deceive with his promises." *Because of his importunity, he will rise* [Lk 11.8], for unremitting effort conquers all, and by the inspiration of his grace *he will give him all he needs*, even if it is not all he sometimes wants.

[THE PERSISTENCE OF PRAYER]

4. The persistence of prayer: *And I say to you: Ask, and it shall be given you* [Lk 11.9]. So Zechariah 10 says:

*Ask ye the Lord rain in the latter season: and the Lord will make snows; and will give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field*. [Zech 10.1]

Snow, which is white and cold, represents the cleanness of chastity; the showers of rain are the devotion of tearful compunction; the grass is compassion for our brother's need, which should always grow green in the field of our heart. We should ask these three of the Lord, if not at once, at least 'in the latter season', later, for *first we should seek the kingdom of God and his justice* [cf. Mt 6.33; Lk 12.31]. Worldly people first make their request for earthly things, lastly for eternal ones; when they should start first from heaven, *where our treasure is*, and therefore *where our heart ought to be* [cf. Mt 6.21; Lk 12.34], and our request.

*Seek, and you shall find* [Lk 11.9]. The Bride says in Canticles 3:

*I will rise and will go about the city.*

*In the streets and the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth*. [Cant 3.2]

The city is the heavenly homeland, in which there are 'streets and broad ways', that is, greater and lesser orders. The soul should rise, lifting herself from earthly things, and go round it, marvelling at the burning love of the seraphim for God, gazing upon the cherubim in their wisdom regarding God, and so on, for the rest, among whom she seeks her Spouse. But because he is higher than all of them, she does not find him, and so she must pass by the 'watchmen', the heavenly spirits, in speculation of mind, in order to be able to find the Beloved.

*Seek, and ye shall find*. So Zephaniah 2 says:

*Seek the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, you that have wrought his judgement: seek the just, seek the meek: if by any means you may be hid in the day of his indignation*. [Zeph 2.3]

And Amos 5:

*Seek the Lord and you shall live. But seek not Bethel and go not into Galgal, neither shall you pass over to Bersabee*. [Am 5.4-5]

The children of Israel made golden calves and placed them in Bethel, to adore them there [cf. 3(1)Kg 12.32]. Gold represents the splendour of temporal glory, the calf is the wanton flesh. *Seek not* these; *and go not into Galga,l,* meaning ‘wallowing place’, the mud of lust in which pigs wallow. *Neither shall you pass over to Bersabee*, ‘the seventh well’, the chasm of cupidity, bottomless and insatiable, just as the seventh day is said to be ‘endless’. Rather:

*Seek ye the Lord while he may be found: call upon him while he is near*. [Is 55.6]

5. So there follows: *Knock, and it shall be opened to you* [Lk 11.9]. Thus it says in Acts 12:

*But Peter continued knocking. And when they had opened, they saw him and were astonished*. [Ac 12.16]

Peter, freed from prison by the angel, stands for anyone who is freed by God’s grace from the prison of sin. He should knock with perseverance at the door of the heavenly court, and then the angels will open to him, that is, they will offer the prayer of his devotion in the sight of God; and their ‘astonishment’ (if I may say so) is the joy they have over a sinner doing penance [cf. Lk 15.10].

[THE LOVE OF A FATHER FOR A SON]

6. The love of a father for a son: *Which of you, if he ask his father bread*, etc. [Lk 11.11]. Let us see what these six opposites signify: bread and stone, fish and serpent, egg and scorpion.

‘Bread’, which stands for every food, is charity, which should find its place with every food of good action. *Let all be done in charity* [1Cor 16.14], he says. Just as a table seems lacking, without bread, so the other virtues are nothing without charity, because by charity alone are they perfected. Leviticus 26 says:

*You shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land without fear*. [Lev 26.5]

The Lord promises two things here, which we will have perfectly in the future, namely fullness of charity, whereby the soul is satisfied, and peace in the land which is our flesh. Any Christian, a child of grace, should ask this bread of God his father, so that he may love him above all things, and his neighbour as himself. So he says: *Give us this day our daily bread* [Lk 11.3].

*Will he give him a stone?* [Lk 11.11]. Job 28 says:

*The stone that is in the dark and the shadow of death:*

*the flood divideth from the people that are on their journey*. [Job 28.3-4]

The flood is compunction of tears, which separates the ‘stone of darkness’ (the hardness of a blind mind) and the ‘shadow of death’ (mortal sin, which comes from the devil, *whose name is Death* [cf. Apoc 6.8]), from the ‘people on their journey’, penitents who should reckon themselves pilgrims in this exile. When a son asks for charity, God his father will not give him hardness of heart, rather he removes it. He says:

*I will take away your stony heart* that does not feel,

*and will give you a heart of flesh* which will sorrow. [Ezek 36.26]

*Or a fish*. The fish is faith in what cannot be seen. Just as a fish is born, lives and is nourished under the covering of the waters, so faith (which is in God) is generated invisibly in the soul, consecrated by the invisible grace of the Spirit by the water of Baptism, and is nourished by the invisible aid of divine protection, lest it grow faint; and by the sight of invisible rewards it does whatever good it can. Or indeed, faith is compared to a fish because just as the latter is tossed repeatedly by the waves of the sea, yet is not destroyed, so faith is not broken by adversity. Any Christian should ask this fish of God his father, saying, "Grant me to live and die in the faith of your Apostles and of your holy catholic Church."

7. *Will he for a fish give him a serpent?* [Lk 11.11]. A serpent creeps by hidden ways, and every serpent is cold by nature, nor does it strike unless it is heated. Some say that serpents are born of the marrow of a dead man’s spine.[1] It is said to die if the leaves of a bush are cast upon it. It is said, too, that it is afraid if it sees a man naked, but it attacks him if he is clothed. Serpents love wine exceedingly, and eat flesh and herbs, and suck moisture from animals to which they attach themselves. The ‘serpent’ is the devil, who approaches secretly in order to tempt, or else it is his lack of faith, creeping like a crab. The devil is ‘cold’ by his ingrained malice, but when inflamed with the heat of hurting, tries to inject the poison of infidelity into the souls of the faithful, who alone live. All others are dead, because they have been killed by the poison of faithlessness, which arises in their hearts and goes out to kill others. But thanks be to God, who has given us the antidote to this poison, the ‘leaves of a bush’. The bush, *which was on fire and was not*

*burnt* [cf. Ex 3.2], is the humanity of Jesus Christ, who, quite full of thorns, burned in the fire of the Passion, yet was not burnt up. *My strength is dried up like a potsherd* [Ps 21.16], he said. His 'leaves' (that is, his words) kill the serpent, the devil and his infidelity.

The devil fears a naked man, Christ's little poor man, stripped of temporal things. When he sees a man who is clothed , a covetous man, wrapped in temporal things, he attacks him; he presses temptations upon him strongly, and if possible injects his poison. Alternatively, the 'naked man' is the one who lacks the clothing of self-will, regarding which Mark 10 says that the blond man, *casting off his garment, leaped up and came to Jesus* [Mk 10.50]. He who wants to receive the light, and come to salvation, must cast far away his self-will. He who is clad in the robe of self-will, the devil at once attacks him. This is clear in Adam, for while he was obedient the devil feared him:

*They were both naked, and were not ashamed*. [Gen 2.25]

But when he covered himself with the garment of self-will, the serpent assailed him:

*When they perceived themselves to be naked, they sewed together fig-leaves, and made themselves aprons*. [Gen 3.7]

Again, the devil greatly loves the 'wine' of lust, the 'flesh' (carnality) of gluttony; and he gladly takes into himself the bright herbs of temporal glory. He fastens on to a man by consent, and sucks out the moisture of compunction from him. God our father will not give his son such a serpent, when he asks for a fish; rather he makes him faithful from being unfaithful, turns him from death to life.

8. *Or if he shall ask an egg* [Lk 11.12], which represents the certainty of our hope, because in an egg we see a creature not yet perfect, yet which, with care, we hope for. An egg is inwardly full of moisture; in the same way, he who hopes for eternal things is full of the moisture of devotion. Natural History says that eggs differ in shape, some being narrow and some broad. Long eggs with a sharp end produce males; round, blunt ended, eggs produce females. There are also 'wind eggs', which are not fertile, and are small and tasteless. When thunder occurs during the time of incubation, the eggs go bad.

'Sharp-ended eggs' stand for hope of eternal things. The Apostle says:

*Forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before.* [cf.Phil 3.13]

The 'length' or 'sharpness' of the egg represents the soul's desire, which it has in its hope of the heavenly kingdom. >From such an egg a 'male' (virtuous work) is produced. The broad or round egg represents hope in transitory things (if we may call it hope).

*For what a man seeth, why does he hope for?* [Rom 8.24]

In them is ‘the broad way that leads to death’ [cf. Mt 7.13]; and: *The wicked walk round about* [Ps 11.9], *My God, make them like a wheel* [Ps 82.14]. From such an egg a ‘female’ is produced, a weaker work. Such hope is ‘blunt’, obscured, because it ‘loves darkness more than light’ [cf. Jn 3.19]. It is represented by the wind-egg, windy and full of wind. So Hosea 8 says:

*They have sown wind, and reaped the whirlwind.* [Hos 8.7]

Such a fruit comes from such a seed, for those who sow vanity will reap damnation. The ‘hope of the wind’ does not produce the chick of charity; it is small, not growing towards God, and tasteless, because it is not seasoned with the flavour of wisdom.

When ‘thunder’ rolls, the temptations of prosperity or adversity at the beginning of conversion or a new way of life, the eggs of hope and holy intent ‘go off’. The child of grace should ask the egg of eternal hope from the Father of mercy, because, as Jeremiah 17 says:

*Blessed be the man that trusteth in the Lord, and the Lord shall be his confidence.* [Jer 17.7]

9. *Will he reach him a scorpion?* [Lk 11.12], whose poisoned sting in the tail is to be feared. Hope is the opposite of looking back, for hope of future things reaches out to those that are before it. The scorpion (which will not strike the palm of the hand) flatters with the mouth, but strikes with its tail, in which it has two stings that inject poison. The palm of the hand is hairless; our ‘hand’ is good work, our ‘palm’ is the right intention in our work. A ‘hair’ in the palm or the eye is a bad intention. If your eye is simple (meaning your intention), then your whole body (your work) will be light [cf. Lk 11.34]. The ‘scorpion’ is the devil, who flatters with his suggestions, but in the end strikes with the double sting of his tail;. In the present life, he infects body and soul with sin, and afterwards he punishes both. Happy is he who has a ‘palm’ of right intention in his hand, which the devil cannot strike. A pure palm of intention cleanses and beautifies the face and the whole body.

There follows: *If you, then, being evil*, etc. [Lk 11.13]. Every creature is evil in the sight of the divine goodness, for *None is good but God alone* [Lk 18.19]. It is an apt comparison. If a sinful man, still burdened with frail flesh, does not deny temporal things to his children who ask him, much more will the heavenly Father give the good things that fail not in heaven, to his children who are endowed with fear and love. May he grant us these things, he who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

10. *There came some from Sichem and from Silo and from Samaria, fourscore men, with*

*their beards shaven and their clothes rent and mourning: and they had offerings and incense in their hand, to offer in the house of the Lord.* [Jer 41.5]

This text is from Jeremiah 41. Just as those men came together to pray to the Lord, so we too should come together at this time; wherefore, these days are called in Greek '*letaniai*', which we call 'rogations', which are devoted to praying and making our requests to God. They were instituted especially for two reasons, namely to ask God to forgive sins, as Isaiah 58 says:

*They ask of me the judgements of justice: they are willing to approach to God*; [Is 58.2]

and to ask for the benefits of mercy both in spiritual and temporal matters. In order that we may deservedly receive them, we should do spiritually what those eighty men did in bodily fashion. The 'eighty' are all those who, in the seven ages of this present life, await the eighth day of the resurrection. They are all called 'men', because they do virtuous works, not soft and feeble ones. 'Virile' and 'virtuous' are related words. They come from Sichem (meaning 'labour'), from Silo ('where is she') and from Samaria ('wool', which is pulled or torn out). These three places represent three characteristics of temporal goods- they are acquired with labour, held onto with fear (the miser is always saying of his money, "Where is it?"), and lost with sorrow. What a shearing and stripping of the heart! He who wants to ask God sincerely, must put all these things behind him.

11. There follows: *With beards shaven*, a reference to the work of virtue. The Psalm says: *Like the precious ointment on the head, that ran down upon the beard, the beard of Aaron* [Ps 132.2], whose name means 'strong mountain', and who signifies the constant man who 'puts out his hand to strong things' [cf. Prov 31.19], and on whose 'head', or mind, is the ointment of divine grace. A boxer about to fight is accustomed to anoint his head; so God anoints the mind of the just man, that he may be strong against the ancient enemy. This ointment comes down upon either beard, because from the abundance of inward grace strong works are anointed with a double charity. Someone 'shaves' his beard, when he does not presume upon any virtue of his own good work; so that Isaiah says:

*In that day the Lord shall shave with a razor that is sharp* (or hired by) *them that are beyond the river, the head and hairs of the feet, and the whole beard*. [Is 7.20]

Penitents are beyond the river of worldly pleasure, and with the sharp (or hired) razor of his Passion, the Lord shaves from them all presumption of good works. Who can presume or glory in a good work, when he sees the Son of the Father, *his power and wisdom* [cf. 1Cor 1.24], fastened to the Cross and hanging between thieves? 'Head', 'feet' and 'beard' denote the beginning, middle and end of good works, which the Lord 'shaves' in the penitent, since he will not let him presume in the beginning, middle or end of any good work; so that: *He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord* [1Cor 1.31; 2Cor 10.17], not himself.

12. There follows: *and their clothes rent.* The ‘clothes’ are the bodily members, of which Apocalypse 3 says:

*Thou hast a few names in Sardis which have not defiled their garments,* [Apoc 3.4]

that is, their members. Truly, there are few in Sardis (which means ‘beauty of the princedom’), denoting virginity; he who has this possesses the ‘beauty of princedom’. O how beautiful is the principality, when the Creator controls the spirit, and the spirit the flesh. He ‘rends his clothes’ who does not spare himself in bodily affliction; so that Job 1 says:

*He rose up, and rent his garments: and having shaven his head fell down upon the ground and worshipped.* [Job 1.20]

Job (‘sorrowful’) is the penitent who sorrows in contrition, rises in confession, rends his garment (his flesh) in satisfaction, shaves his head in humility of mind, falls on the ground in the remembrance of death, and worships in thanksgiving.

*And mourning*. This implies pallor, emaciation, untidiness and dryness. Penitents mourn with these, being pale in face, emaciated in body, dishevelled in dress and dried up in eating.

13. *They had offerings and incense in their hand.* Natural History says that the design of the human hand makes it well-adapted to all kinds of task, since it is extended, and divided into many parts; and one can use one alone or two, or many, in various ways. The mobility of the fingers is well-adapted for taking and holding. The ‘hand’ denotes our work, which we should extend for the utility of our neighbour, and divide into many parts, when necessary. He uses ‘one part’ when he waits upon God; two, when he ministers to his neighbour food for soul and body. The mobility of the ‘fingers’ (the virtues) performs two functions: it receives grace when it is given, and holds on to it and keeps it, so as not to lose it. In this ‘hand’ we should have the gifts of virtue, charity and alms, and the incense of inner devotion, so that whatever we do, we do with devotion.

*To offer in the house of the Lord.* This is what is said in Apocalypse 8:

*The smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints went up before God from the hand of the angel.* [Apoc 8.4]

He who seeks his own praise for the works he does, does not offer his gifts in the house of God, nor does the smoke of his incense go up before God. We are taught here that we should make the offering of our work ‘in the house of God’ (that is, a pure conscience wherein he dwells), before him; and we should look for a reward from him alone. And so, by the ministry of the angel who is appointed to guard us, our devotion will go up before God, and his grace will come down to us, so that at last we may go up to his glory. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] cf. RABANUS MAURUS, *De universo*, VIII,3; PL 111.234-5. The other information is found in Pliny, Rabanus, Hugo de Folieto, Aristotle etc.

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

1. At that time: *While the eleven disciples were at table, Jesus appeared to them*. [Mk16.14]

In this Gospel three things are noted: the last appearance of Christ, the sending of the Apostles to preach, and his Ascension into heaven.

[THE LAST APPEARANCE OF CHRIST]

2. The last appearance of Christ: *While the eleven*. Note that Jesus appeared ten times to his disciples after the Resurrection. On the day of Resurrection he appeared five times, as was said above in the sermon: *The almond-tree shall flourish*. Sixthly, he appeared to Thomas with the other disciples, on the octave of the Resurrection [cf. Jn 20.26]. Seventhly, at the sea of Tiberias [cf. Jn 21.1]. Eighthly, at the mountain where he had appointed them [cf. Mt 28.16]. Ninthly and tenthly today. "Today he came to them in Jerusalem and said: *Stay you in the city till you be endued with power from on high* [Lk 24.49]. When he had eaten with them (from which we understand that the sixth hour had passed, and this was the ninth appearance) he led them out to the mount of Olives opposite Bethany. And lifting up his hands, he blessed them. And as they looked on, he was lifted up into the sky, and a bright cloud bore him away,"[1] and this was the tenth appearance.

So: *While the eleven disciples were at table, Jesus appeared to them*. Note that it was while they were 'at table, sitting down in peace and humility of heart, that the Lord appeared. So Isaiah 66 says:

*To whom shall I have respect, but to him that is poor and little and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my words?* [Is 66.2]

You cannot see your face if you look into troubled and moving water. If you want to see Christ's face appear in you when you look, sit down and be quiet. *Stay you in the city till you be endued with power from on high*, he said. To 'stay in the city' is to rest in conscience from all outside clamour. So it is said in II Kings 7 that *David sat in his cedar house, and the Lord gave him rest on every side from all his enemies* [cf. 2Kg(Sm) 7.1-

2]. Natural History says that the cedar is a tall tree with a pleasant smell, and long lasting. Serpents flee from its scent and it has the property of bearing fruit at all times, both in winter and summer. The 'cedar house' is the just man's conscience. It is 'tall' by love of God, 'pleasant smelling' by decent conversation, 'long lasting' by perseverance. It puts serpents to flight (carnal movements, or the demons) by the scent of its purity or devout prayer. It bears the fruit of eternal salvation both in the winter of adversity and the summer of prosperity. He who sits in such a house will be safe from his enemies on every side- the devil, the world and the flesh. He will have rest, being clothed in power from on high, not from below (the world). He who is clothed from there is easily routed in battle. He who is clothed from on high, with the power of the Holy Spirit, crushes his enemies and does works of virtue.

3. There follows: *And he upbraided them with their incredulity and hardness of heart, because they did not believe them who had seen him after he was risen again* [Mk 16.14]. O how unhappy they are, who will not believe Peter, to whom Christ appeared and who saw him risen from the dead! Peter says, in Acts 3:

*The author of life you killed, whom God hath raised from the dead; of which we are witnesses* [Ac 3.15], *who did eat and drink with him, after he rose again from the dead* [Ac 10.41].

This indicates a true resurrection of the flesh. Those who deny a future resurrection of the body, do not believe that Christ has risen from the dead. So I Corinthians 15 says:

*If Christ be preached, that he rose again from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If thee be no resurrection from the dead, then Christ is not risen again; and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain*. [1Cor 15.12-14]

In that general resurrection of the body, God will reprove and condemn those who are unbelieving and hard of heart, who now do not believe it will happen.

[THE SENDING OF THE APOSTLES TO PREACH]

4. The sending of the Apostles to preach: *Go ye into the whole world* [Mk 16.15]. There is something similar in Isaiah 18:

*Go, ye swift angels, to a nation rent and torn in pieces: to a terrible people, after which there is no other: to a nation expecting and trodden under foot*. [Is 18.2]

The human race was rent from the joy of Paradise, torn by the harassment of the devil, terrified in soul of the pains of hell, trodden down in body by its reduction to dust, yet expecting the Saviour of the world, to which he sent his swift angels, the obedient Apostles, saying:

*Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature,* [Mk 16.15]

that is, to the whole human race, which has something in common with every creature, angels, beasts, trees, stones, fire and water, hot and cold, damp and dry; for man is called a ‘microcosm’, a ‘little world’.

*He that believeth* (that is, who confesses his faith in person or through another),

*and is baptised* (that is, who perseveres in Baptism),

*shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name*, etc. [Mk 16.16-17]

"At that time, there were signs for the conversion of unbelievers; now that faith has grown, signs have ceased. When we plant a grove, we water it for a while, until it is established in the ground."[2]

5. Morally. The world is ever in motion, No rest is granted to its elements, in all its four corners-east, west, south or north. Just as the world is composed of four elements, so (according to the ancients) man, called a ‘little world’, consists of four humours, mixed into a single temperament. Wretched man, from the beginning to the end of his life, is always in motion, never resting until he comes to his own place, that is, until he reaches God. So Augustine[3] says, "My heart is restless, Lord, until it reaches you." As it is said: *And his place is in peace* [Ps 75.3]. Man’s place is God. He will never have peace, except in him; and so he must return to him. The ‘corners’ of human life are: the ‘east’ of his birth, the ‘west’ of his death, the ‘south’ of prosperity and the ‘north’ of adversity. Into this world we must go: *Go into all the world*, he says, and consider what you were in your birth, what you will be in your death, what you are when prosperity parches you or adversity assails you- whether one lifts you up or the other casts you down. From this fourfold consideration there comes a fourfold utility: mistrust of self, contempt for the world, constancy so as not to be over-confident, patience so as not to be overwhelmed.

It is good to go into all the world, then, and to preach the Gospel to every creature. The Apostle says in II Corinthians 5:

*If any be in Christ, he is a new creature, the old things are passed away. Behold, all things are made new*. [2Cor 5.17]

And the Psalm says:

*The people that shall be created shall praise the Lord.* [Ps 101.19]

And the penultimate chapter of Isaiah:

*Behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and the people thereof joy.*

*And I will rejoice in Jerusalem and joy in my people*. [Is 65.18-19]

"To create is to make something out of nothing."[4] When man is in mortal sin, he is nothing; because God, who truly is, is not in him by grace. Augustine says, "Men become nothing, when they sin." But when he is converted to penitence by the grace of God, there is created in him a new creature, a pure and new conscience. This is 'Jerusalem' ('peaceful'), which rejoices over God's mercy which has been given it. There is created, too, a 'people' of many good affections and thoughts, the joy and praise of God for his sweetness, of which they have a foretaste. Then the 'old things', the faded acts and conversation of the five senses, pass away and depart, and new things in Christ are made; so that man 'lives not now to himself, but unto him who died for him' [cf. 2Cor 5.15]. This, then, is 'every creature', the renewal of the inward and the outward man, and of grace. To this creation we must preach the Gospel of the kingdom, that is, we must announce good news. '*Euangelion*' in Greek is the same as 'good news' in our tongue. He announces good news to every creature, who shapes himself inwardly and outwardly with virtues. He preaches the Gospel of the kingdom to every creature, who in the secrecy of his heart considers how great will be the glory of standing before the Creator's face, with the blessed spirits; with them to praise him without end, and with him who is Life ever to live, and continuously rejoice with an inexpressible joy.

From such preaching two other things proceed, as follows: *He who believes and is baptised*. To 'believe' is to give one's heart. As he says: *My son, give me thy heart* [cf. Prov 23.26]. He who gives his heart, gives his all. So he 'believes', who subjects himself wholly to God in devotion of heart. He is 'baptised' when he overflows with tears, either from the sweetness of contemplation, the remembrance of his own sins, or compassion for his brother's need. *He that believeth not*, that is, will not give his heart to God. If you do not give it to God, you must needs give it to the devil, the flesh or the world; and who so gives *will be condemned*.

6. *These signs shall follow them that believe* thus. Those who give their heart to God, these signs will follow, because there is already a sign upon their very heart. Canticles 8 says:

*Put me as a seal upon thy heart.* [Cant 8.6]

When we want to protect our possessions or house from robbers, we often display there the seal or banner of the king, or of some great man, so that when they see it they are afraid to break in. So, if we want to protect our heart against the demons, let us put Jesus upon it, who is our salvation, and where there is salvation there is also health.

So there follows: *In my name they shall cast out demons* [Mk 16.17]. 'Demons' comes from the Greek '*daimones*', meaning 'skilled' or 'knowledgeable'. The Greek '*daimon*' means 'extremely shrewd'. The 'demons' are the wisdom of the flesh and the craftiness

of the world, which, as demons vex a man, vex the spirit of man and weary the body with care. The wisdom of the flesh is the ‘night-time devil’, the craftiness of the world is the ‘noon-day devil’; the former, because it is blind, although to itself it seems very keen-sighted (it is very keen-sighted at night, like a cat); the latter, because it blazes with the heat of malice, like the sun at noon-day. He who gives his heart to God casts out these demons from himself, and does also that which follows.

*They shall speak with new tongues* [Mk 16.17]. The language of the world is the ‘old tongue’, because it speaks old things about the old man. Those who are vexed by the aforesaid demons, speak these tongues; but when they cast them out from themselves, they speak new tongues in newness of life. So Isaiah 19 says:

*In that day, there shall be five cities in the land of Egypt, speaking the language of Canaan, and swearing by the Lord of hosts. One shall be called the City of the Sun*. [Is 19.18]

The land of Egypt (which means ‘darkness’) is the human body, darkened with guilt and pain. In it are ‘five cities’, the five bodily senses, of which one, sight, is called the City of the Sun, because sight illuminates the whole body as the sun does the whole world. These cities speak the language of Canaan (‘exchanged’), but with ‘the change of the right hand of the most High’ [cf. Ps 76.11] they ‘strip themselves of the old man with his deeds’ [cf. Col 3.9], and ‘put on the new man, living in justice and truth’ [cf. Eph 4.24]. Just as speech sends out the word that lay hidden in the heart, so the five human senses, now changed and converted to God, speak of him outwardly as he is inwardly. This is ‘to swear’, that is, to speak the truth. The truth of conscience is affirmed by the witness of holy conversation, to the praise of the Lord of the angelic hosts.

There is further added: *They shall take up serpents* [Mk 16.18], denoting flattery and detraction which creep in and inject poison. The flatterer creeps, the detractor injects poison. Those who speak in new tongues take away these serpents from themselves. *Let old matters depart from your mouth* [1Kg(Sm) 2.3], he says. The saliva of a fasting man kills a serpent; it is a fasting tongue, as it were a new tongue, whose medicine takes away poison. The ancient serpent as it were flattered Eve, saying: *No, you shall not die the death* [Gen 3.4]; he slandered God when he added:

*God doth know that on what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.* [Gen 3.5]

This was as though to say, God has forbidden you out of envy, not wanting you to be like him in knowledge. See how flattery creeps in, and detraction injects poison! He who has a fasting tongue may spit in the mouth of the serpent and kill him, and so take him away.

7. There follows: *And if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them* [Mk 16.18]. The Gloss says here, "When they hear harmful persuasions, they will not lead them into actions; so that it will not harm them, though they drink something deadly."

Isaiah 24 says:

*They shall not drink wine with a song: the drink shall be bitter to them that drink it,* [Is 24.9]

and so it will not hurt them. He ‘drinks not with a song’ the wine of the devil’s suggestion, who does not consent to it, but rather rejects it, mourning and weeping. So that drink, the devil’s suggestion, is ‘bitter to them that drink it’, those who hear and suffer it. On the contrary, Joel says:

*Awake, ye that are drunk, and weep and mourn all ye that take delight in drinking sweet wine: for it is cut off from your mouth.* [Joel 1.5]

This is literally true, because the sweetness of wine is lost from the mouth as soon as the taste passes away. The briefest moment of sweetness, how much evil it brings forth to him who drinks the wine of the devil’s suggestion in consent of mind and deed! To those drunk with wine, this is said: ‘Awake’ in remembrance of your sin, ‘weep’ in contrition of heart, ‘mourn’ in confession.

Whoever has the aforesaid four, will be well able to perform the fifth work for his neighbour: *They shall lay their hands upon the sick, and they shall recover* [Mk 16.18]. A sick person is in need of a remedy or medicine. The ‘sick man’ is the sinner, who greatly needs the medicine of good example. Someone ‘lays hands on him’ so that he may be well, that is, return to penitence, when he strengthens him not only with the word of preaching, but also by the example of good deeds. Amen.

[CHRIST’S ASCENSION INTO HEAVEN]

8. His Ascension into heaven: *And the Lord Jesus* (who came down from heaven), *after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven* [Mk 16.19]. Proverbs 30 is **concordant** to this:

*Who hath ascended up into heaven, and descended?*

*Who hath held the wind in his hands?*

*Who hath bound up the waters together in a garment?*

*Who hath raised up all the borders of the earth?*

*What is his name, and what is the name of his son, if thou knowest?* [Prov 30.4]

Note these three: ‘held’, ‘bound’ and ‘raised’. Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Father, came down from heaven and took our mortal flesh; and with it, now immortal, he

ascended into heaven, whence he sent the Spirit of sevenfold grace, whom he held in the hands of his power. That is, he gives to whom he will, when he will, and he limits it however he will. So Job 36 says:

*In his hands he hideth the light, and commandeth it to come again.*

*He sheweth his friend concerning it, that it is his possession,*

*and that he may come up to it*. [Job 36.32-33]

When from time to time he shows the light of conscience and internal joy to the friend of God, it is like a light enclosed in his hand, as it shines and hides at the whim of the holder; so that by this means the mind may burn to possess the eternal light, and the inheritance of the full vision of God.

Again, he 'binds' (that is, restrains) the 'waters' (carnal desires) in a 'garment', the body, which clothes the soul like a garment, and of which Job says:

*Who am to be consumed as rottenness, and as a garment that is moth-eaten.* [Job 13.28]

Moths hatch out in a garment and eat it away; corruption arises in the body, and consumes it. He binds in this garment the ways of the senses, with the string of love or the rope of fear, so that the waters of carnal desire do not flow out; and so he 'raises all the borders of the earth', those in whom earthly concerns have already reached their limit, to penitence and to eternal glory.

*He was taken up into heaven*, then, so that he might lift up the earth with him, and make heaven. The Father says to him in Isaiah 51:

*I have put my words in thy mouth,*

*and have protected thee in the shadow of my hand,*

*that thou mightest plant the heavens and found the earth,*

*and mightest say to Sion: Thou art my people*. [Is 51.16]

The Son himself says in John 8:

*He that sent me is true, and the things I have heard of him,*

*these same I speak in the world.* [Jn 8.26]

In the hour of his Passion, the Father protected him with the shadow of his powerful hand, because he gave him coolness against the heat of the Jews' rage. So it says in the Psalm:

*Thou hast overshadowed my head in the day of battle,* [Ps 139.8]

when he fought with hands nailed to the Cross against the powers of the air. He planted the heavens of his divinity in the earth of our humanity, and founded (that is, firmly established) the earth of our humanity in heaven.

Whence there follows: *And sitteth at the right hand of God* [Mk 16.19]. So,

*The Lord said to my Lord Sit thou at my right hand*. [Ps 109.1]

The Father said to the Son, rest and reign with me, in the place of greater power.

May Jesus himself, sharer in our nature, make us to be sharers in these things; he who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

9. *With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I return with two companies.* [Gen 32.10]

This text comes from Genesis 32. The words are those of Jacob, returning from Mesopotamia to the land of his birth. They can also be taken as the words of Christ, returning from the world to the Father, with his staff the Cross. I Kings 17 says:

*The Philistine said to David: Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with a staff?* [1Kg(Sm) 17.43]

The Philistine (meaning 'falling from drink' or 'double ruin') is the devil, who being drunk with pride, fell from heaven and made man fall into a double ruin, of soul and body. He is called 'a dog', because he barks at the innocent with his suggestions, and takes no notice of his parent, his Creator. Our David, Christ, to fight for us, comes against him with the staff of the Cross, as was said of him a little way above:

*David took his staff, which he always had in his hands, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in the shepherd's scrip, which he had with him. And he took a sling in his hand, and went forth against the Philistine*. [1Kg(Sm) 17.40]

Behold the weapons with which Jesus Christ has killed our enemy! Christ ever had the staff of the Cross in his hands: before the Passion in his deeds, during the Passion with his hands nailed to it, after the Passion keeping the marks of it in his hands, so as to

show them to the Father on our behalf. So he says in Isaiah 49:

*I have graven thee in my hands.* [Is 49.16]

Note that to make a piece of writing at least three things are needed: paper, pen and ink. The ‘paper’ was Christ’s hands, the ‘pen’ the nail, the ‘ink’ his blood. This writing bears witness to our deliverance, confutes the enemy and reconciles us to our Father God. The ‘five smooth stones’ are the five wounds of Christ, which he chose from the brook of our mortality. The ‘shepherd’s scrip’ is the love with which he loved us to the end:

*The good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep*.[Jn 10.11]

He put the five smooth stones in this scrip, because for the love of us which he had in him, he received the five wounds, which have made us ‘smooth’, that is, bright and pure. The ‘sling’, which has equal straps, is the equity of justice with which he condemned the devil, and snatched the human race from his hand. "It was right and just that the devil should lose the human race, over which he seemed to have some right, when he stretched out his hand against Christ, over whom he had no right."[6] He said:

*The prince of this world cometh; and in me he hath not any thing*. [Jn 14.30]

because Christ was *free among the dead* [Ps 87.6], and yet he passed through death to free the dead. So he says: *With my staff I passed over this Jordan*. It is further said: *He shall drink of the torrent in the way* [Ps 109.7]. Alone, with the staff of the Cross, poor and naked, he passed from the bank of our mortality to the bank of his immortality, through the ‘river of judgement’ which is the Jordan. That is, by the shedding of his own blood, in which he judged the devil and condemned him, and destroyed his power.

10. What use his passing would bring us, is clear when there is added: *and now* (that is, today) *I return with two companies*. His going out was from the Father, his return was to the Father; his going down was even to hell, his return was even to the throne of God. Behold ‘the ring in the nose of Behemoth’ [cf. Job 41.21] and of Sennacherib, to whom the Lord says in Isaiah 37:

*I will put a ring in thy nose and a bit between thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way which thou camest*. [Is 37.29]

Christ the wisdom of the Father, having no beginning nor end, like a circle, going out from the Father and returning to the Father, comprehending all things in himself, and enclosing the whole universe in his breast, took prisoner the craftiness of the devil (represented by his ‘nose’). Just as we smell out from afar by means of our nose, so the devil, by his subtle craftiness, perceives the sin most well adapted to a man, and strives to catch him in it.

A bit has two parts, the iron and the strap. The iron is placed in the horse's mouth, with the strap it is restrained and led about. Christ in his Passion made a 'bit' from the nails and the strap of his humanity, to subdue and restrain the devil, lest he run wild at his own will; indeed, so that he should go back by the way he came. He came by Eve, Adam and the fruit of the forbidden tree. He was sent back, and lost what he had wickedly stolen, by Mary, Christ and the tree of the Cross; whereby our Jacob passed over this Jordan and overthrew the devil, and today returned to heaven with two companies.

*Jacob divided the people that was with him, into two companies*: [cf. Gen 32.7]

*the handmaids and their children in the first company, and the free women, Lia and Rachel, and their children, in the second*. [cf. Gen 33.1-2]

These two companies represent the Church, gathered from two peoples: the gentiles (represented by the handmaids) and the Jewish people (the free women, because of their knowledge of God and of the law given by him). Christ gained her by much labour in Mesopotamia (the world), and returning to heaven today bore her with him; because he took her faith and devotion with him, so that her heart and conversation should not be in earth but in heaven [cf. Phil 3.20]. May he who is blessed for ever lead us there. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

11. *With my staff*. Let us see what is the moral significance of these four, the staff, the Jordan, the two companies.

The discipline of penance is denoted by the staff; regarding which Juda said to Thamar in Genesis 38:

*What wilt thou have for a pledge? Thamar answered: The ring and the bracelet, and the staff which thou holdest in thy hand*. [Gen 38.18]

Juda is Christ, who was sprung from his tribe, according to the Apostle [cf. Heb 7.14]. Thamar (meaning 'exchanged', or 'bitter', or 'palm') is the soul, who is changed from evil to good, who is bitter in penitence, that thereafter she may have the palm of glory. So Job 29 says:

*I shall die in my nest, and as a palm-tree shall multiply my days;* [Job 29.18]

meaning, 'in a humble and tranquil conscience'. Alternatively, this three-fold interpretation denotes the three-fold states of beginners, proficients and perfect.

So Christ says to the soul, *What wilt thou have for a pledge?* A pledge is something given as a guarantee. The soul, so as to be sure of the promise, asks a pledge in the form of a ring, a bracelet and a staff. The 'ring' denotes formed faith. So Luke 15 says:

*Put a ring on his hand* [Lk 15.22]. The Gloss says that the ring is the seal of faith, by which the promises are signed upon the hearts of the faithful. To ‘put it on the hand’ is to put it into operation, so that faith may shine out in works, and by faith works may be strengthened. The ‘bracelet’ on the arm, going round the arm, is the work of charity, which extends the arm to succour, and supports the shoulder to bear the burden of a brother’s need [cf. Gen 49.15]. The ‘staff’, with which to defend oneself against dogs, and support oneself against falling, is (as has been said) the discipline of penance. By this the soul defends herself against the devil or carnal appetite, and supports herself against falling into mortal sin. In these three we understand the whole of justice, which is "to render unto each what is his own,"[7] namely the ring of faith to God, the bracelet of charity to our neighbour, and the staff of the discipline of penance to oneself.

12. So it is said: *With my staff I passed over this Jordan*, which means ‘descent’ or ‘apprehension of them’. This is a reference to transitory things; whoever wants to apprehend them must ‘descend’, that is, from his state of rectitude, his peace of mind, and the sweetness of contemplation. As Gregory[8] says, "Whoever would help someone who has fallen, must get down with the fallen man." Happy is he who can say, In the discipline of my penance I have crossed the Jordan of transitory and fallen things, from the bank of worldly vanity to the bank of heavenly conversation.

So Genesis 32 says:

*Jacob passed over the ford of Jaboc. And when all things were brought over that belonged to him, he remained alone.* [Gen 32.22-23]

Jaboc means ‘stream of dust’, and it stands for temporal things, which stream abundantly in the winter of our present misery, but dry up in the summer, the heat of death and future judgement. They blind their lovers like dust. Dust is blown about by the force of the wind; so these temporal things are blown about by the wind of adversity or death, and are snatched away. But Jacob, the just man who overthrows the world, passes through temporal things, lest he pass away with them, and nothing remain of what is his; but he takes across everything that belongs to him. What belongs to a just man? Humility, charity, chastity and the other virtues. He who takes these across with him, remains ‘alone’, solitary, from the noisy world, tumultuous thoughts, the assault of demons. Happy, then, is he who so crosses, because in the hour of death he will be able to say: *And now I return with two companies.*

Canticles 4 is **concordant**: *All with twins, and there is none barren among them.* [Cant 4.2]

And again:

*Thy two breasts like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies,*

*till the day break and the shadows retire*. [Cant 4.5-6]

The roe lives among the rocks, keen-eyed, eating grass and striving ever higher. The ‘roe’ is the soul of the just man, which keeps to the rocky places in desire for heaven, and so supports herself there. She has the keen sight of faith, and chooses the grass of the eternal pastures to refresh herself with. Her two breasts are the two affections of charity, with the sweetness of whose milk she feds herself and her neighbour. They are ‘two young roes that are twins’, the young who feed among the lilies. The affection of divine charity feeds among the lilies of mental and bodily chastity, or in joyful contemplation. The affection of fraternal charity feeds among the white lilies of good reputation. How long will they so feed? Until the day of eternal glory breaks, and the shadows of our present blindness retire.

Let the just man say, then: *Now*, at the end of my life, *I return* to the heavenly homeland *with the two companies* of the contemplative and active life. May he who is blessed for ever make us to attain this. Amen.

NOTES

[1] cf. P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, Actus Apostolorum*, , 1; PL 198.1645

[2] cf. GREGORY, *In Evangelia homilia* 29,4; PL 76.1215

[3] cf. AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, I,1; PL 32.661

[4] P.LOMBARD, *Sententiae* II, *dist*. 1,2

[5] AUGUSTINE, *In Ioannis evangelium*, tract. I,13; PL 35.1385

[6] cf. AUGUSTINE, *De Trinitate*, XIII,14,18; PL 42.1027-8; P.LOMBARD, *Sententiae* III, *dist* 20.3

[7] AMBROSE, *De officiis*, I,24,125; PL 16.62

[8] In fact, RICHARD OF ST VICTOR, *De gradibus caritatis*, 4; PL 196.1204

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

1. *The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you*. [Jn 14.26]

[PROLOGUE: THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE COMFORTER]

2. 'Paracletos' is the Greek for 'comforter'. The Holy Spirit is named 'Comforter' because he consoles those whom he fills, so that though they lose temporal things, they rejoice with eternal joy. So Isaiah 51 says:

*The Lord will comfort Sion, and will comfort all the ruins thereof.*

*And he will make her desert as a place of pleasure,*

*and her wilderness as the garden of the Lord.*

*Joy and gladness shall be found therein,*

*thanksgiving and the voice of praise*. [Is 51.3]

We will explain this text, first morally and then anagogically.

3. [Morally.] Sion, which means 'crag' or 'look-out point', is the soul of the just man, which like a rocky crag in the sea is buffeted by the waves of temptation, and yet is not worn away or moved; and therefore looks within itself and above itself. "Grant me to know myself and you," says Augustine.[1] The Holy Spirit comforts this Sion, saying:

*Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.* [Mt 5.5]

And Isaiah 41 says:

*To comfort all that mourn: to appoint to the mourners of Sion.* [Is 61.2-3]

To mourn is to be without light; whoever lacks the light of worldly glory, the Holy Spirit will fill with the consolation of his grace.

So there follows: *And he will comfort all the ruins thereof*. This is what the Lord says in Matthew 19:

*He that hath left house or brethren*, etc. *will receive an hundredfold,* [Mt 19.29]

that is, spiritual gifts and virtues which are worth a hundred times more than temporal and carnal things. When the latter fall into ruin, the former rise up; the proud man falls, the humble man rises; the lustful man falls, the chaste man rises, and so with the rest.

*And he will make her desert as a place of pleasure.* A desert is as it were a deserted place, and it represents the heart of the just man, which because it does not frequent present consolations, takes pleasure in the grace of the Holy Spirit. What shall I call 'pleasure', if not the sweetness of contemplation, devotion of mind and compassion for our neighbour?

*And her wilderness* (that is, poverty) *as the garden of the Lord.* Of this, the Bride says in Canticles 6:

*My beloved is gone down into his garden.* [Cant 6.1]

St Bernard[2] says, "In heaven, all good things are abundantly available; only poverty is not to be found among them. On earth, this kind of thing abounds, and man does not know its worth. The Son of God came to seek it, so as to make it precious in his estimation."

*Joy* (for sin forgiven) *and gladness* (for an enlightened conscience), *thanksgiving* (for temporal benefits) *and the voice of praise* (for spiritual gifts) *shall be found therein* (i.e. in the aforesaid Sion).

4. Anagogically. Note that in this text the word 'comfort' occurs twice, on account of the double comfort the just man receives in the general resurrection: namely, the robe of soul and body. So the last chapter of Proverbs says:

*All her domestics are clothed in double garments.* [Prov 31.21]

And Isaiah 61:

*For your double confusion and shame they shall praise their part; therefore they shall receive double in their land. Everlasting joy shall be to them*. [Is 61.7]

What is ‘double’ consists of two parts. He comforts the soul, and he comforts the body, because he restores their ruins. So the Lord promises in the last chapter of Amos:

*In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, that is fallen:*

*and I will close up the breaches of the walls thereof and repair what was fallen*. [Am 9.11]

He will raise up the ‘tabernacle of David’ the body of the just man which had fallen in death, ‘in that day’ of the general resurrection; when he will rebuild the ‘breaches of the walls’ (the passions of his members), so that no passion may have dominion over him. And because there is no0 true resurrection unless what falls rises again, there is added: *And I will repair what was fallen.* So Job says:

*And in my flesh I shall see God my Saviour* [Job 19.26].

And because the just man is a ‘desert’ here, as to stillness of soul, and a ‘wilderness’ as to poverty of body, his soul takes pleasure in the savour of wisdom, with which the angels are satisfied; and his body is like the garden of the Lord, watered with four gifts, like the four rivers of Paradise. Regarding these there is added: *Joy* in clarity, *gladness* in agility, *thanksgiving* in subtlety and *a voice of praise* in impassibility, *will be found therein*, that is, in the robe of the glorified body. Blessed is he who merits to be consoled by the Paraclete with this double consolation.

[LITERAL SERMON ON THE GOSPEL OF THE FEAST]

5. *The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete*. This is he who is breathed into the hearts of the saints by the Father and the Son. This is he by whom they are sanctified, so as to be fitted to be saints. As the human spirit is the life of the body, so this divine Spirit is the life of spirits. The former life makes able to feel, the latter life makes holy. He is called the Holy Spirit, without whom no spirit, angelic or human, is made holy.

*Whom the Father shall send in my name* [Jn 16.14], that is, in my glory, to manifest my glory; or because he has the same name as the Son, namely, God. The text continues: *He shall glorify me*, because in making you spiritual, he will declare in what way the Son is equal to the Father, he whom they had known according to the flesh, as man [cf. 2Cor 5.16]. Or, by taking away fear, he will make you proclaim my glory to the whole world, which will benefit, not me, but men.

*He will teach you all things*. Joel 2 says:

*Children of Sion, rejoice and be joyful in the Lord your God: because he hath given you a teacher of justice*. [Joel 2.23]

He will teach you to know all things belonging to salvation. So, just before, he promises:

*Behold, I will send you corn and wine and oil, and you shall be filled with them.* [Joel 2.19]

The Holy Spirit is called 'corn' because he strengthens those going to their homeland, *lest they faint in the way* [cf. Mt 15.32]. He is called 'wine' because he gladdens them in tribulation; and 'oil', because he smoothes what is rough. These three were very necessary to the Apostles, about to preach in all the world, and so today he sent them the Holy Spirit to confer these three on them, with which they were filled. So there is sung of them: *They were all filled with the Holy Spirit* [Ac 2.4; 4.31], lest the spirit of the world should enter them. A vessel completely full cannot receive anything more.

*And bring all things to your mind*, that is, he will help you or remind you, and make you remember all things, *whatsoever I shall have said to you.* He will teach you, that you may know; he will prompt you, that you may will. Behold, the Holy Spirit gives the ability to know and to will; let us apply our ability on behalf of our ability, and so we shall be a temple of that Holy Spirit. May the Son, who is blessed for ever, send him to us.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

6. *A swift stream of fire issued forth from before the Ancient of days* [Dan 7.10].

This text is from Daniel 7. There is something similar in Isaiah 44:

*I will pour water upon the thirsty ground and streams upon the dry land :*

*I will pour out my spirit upon thy seed , and my blessing upon thy stock*. [Is 44.3]

This is the very thing Peter preached today in Jerusalem, in Acts 2:

*I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh:*

*and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy*. [Ac 2.17]

A river is an everlasting flowing of waters, which stream perpetually. This 'river' is the grace of the Holy Spirit, which today abundantly watered the hearts of the Apostles, filling them and cleansing them. As was said: *I will pour upon you clean water, and you shall be cleansed from all your filthiness* [Ezek 36.25].

This river is called 'fiery'. "What else is the Holy Spirit but a divine fire? What corporeal fire does to iron, this fire does to the dirty, cold and hard heart. At the incoming of this fire, the human mind little by little loses all blackness, coldness and hardness, and wholly takes on the likeness of that by which it is inflamed. For this purpose it is given to man, for this it is breathed into him, that as far as possible he may be configured to it. For, from the burning of the divine fire, he becomes completely white-hot, and blazes forth

equally, and melts into the love of God, according to these words of the Apostle: *The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost who is given to us* [Rom 5.5]."[3]

Note that by burning, fire brings low what is high, joins together what is divided (as iron to iron), makes bright what is dark, penetrates what is hard, is always mobile, directs all its movements and force upwards and flees the earth, and moves whatever it is engendered in to its own proper operation. These seven properties of fire can be referred to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, which,

by the gift of fear, brings low what is high (that is, proud);

by the gift of piety, joins divided and separated hearts;

by the gift of knowledge, makes bright what is dark;

by the gift of fortitude, penetrates hard hearts;

by the gift of counsel, is always in motion (for he who is counselled by his inspiration does not remain idle, but moves promptly to his own work and the salvation of others. "The grace of the Holy Spirit knows no sluggishness or effort."[4]);

by the gift of understanding, directs all its movements, etc., because by his inspiration he gives man to understand, that is, to inwardly read in his heart, that he may seek what is heavenly and flee what is earthly);

by the gift of wisdom, it moves the mind in which it is engendered to its own operation, because it gives it a taste for it. Ecclesiasticus 24 says: *I perfumed my dwelling* [Ecclus 24.21]. The mind of the just, in which the Holy Spirit dwells, is redolent as a vessel or place in which something sweet-scented is placed.

The grace of the Holy Spirit is called a ‘river of fire’; a river, because it extinguishes the thirst for temporal things and washes away the stains of sin; fiery, because it inflames to love and illuminates to knowledge. So today it is said to appear upon the Apostles in tongues of fire, because it made them to speak and to burn. They burned with love of God, they enlightened their neighbour with a word.

7. It is also said to be ‘swift’. So Acts 2 says:

*Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty wind coming.* [Ac 2.2]

Its might draws the mind above, and casts down eternal woe.

*The stream of the river maketh the city of God joyful,* [Ps 45.5]

because *it filled the whole house where they were sitting* [Ac 2.2].

We have heard where this river went; let us see whence it came out. It *issued forth from before the Ancient of days.* ‘Ancient’, because before everything. Christ says in John 8:

*Before Abraham was made, I am*. [Jn 8.58]

He, then, is the Ancient of days, an origin without a beginning, timelessly forming time, and ruling what is formed, reigning everywhere as God, from before whose face today streams forth the river of fire. The ‘face’ is that by which we are recognised. By the Son we come to know the Father, by the Holy Spirit we come to know the Son.

*When the Paraclete cometh, he shall give testimony of me*. [Jn 15.26]

Let us, then, devoutly ask him to send us the Paraclete, by whom we may know and love him, so that we may be found fit to attain to him. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

8. *A stream of fire*, etc. There is something similar in Isaiah 59:

*When he shall come as a violent stream which the spirit of the Lord driveth on.* [Is 59.19]

The stream stands for the flow of tears which the spirit of contrition makes to flow. So it says in Exodus 17 that Moses struck the rock with his staff, and water came out from it [cf. Ex 17.6]. The rock is the hard heart; if it is struck by the staff of contrition, the water of tears comes out. Sting your eye, and out comes a tear. Sting your heart, and out comes wisdom.

This stream is called ‘of fire’, that is, hot. So Genesis 36 says:

*This is Ana that found the hot waters in the wilderness, when he fed the asses of Sebeon his father*. [Gen 36.24]

Ana (‘gratified’) is the penitent whom divine grace has made grateful. He finds the waters of hot tears, which expel the chill of malice, not in the city and tumult of worldly folk, but in the wilderness of body and mind. A little child is happy when his nurse bathes him in warm water. So the just man, small in malice, is happy when grace, his nurse, washes him with tears. He says:

*Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow.* [Ps 50.9]

He finds these waters when he corrects in himself the ‘asses’ (his asinine obstinacy) with the rod of discipline, and compels them to go into the eternal pastures.

Alternatively, the ‘asses’ are faithful souls, which are called ‘of Sebeon’ (meaning ‘standing in mourning’), who represents Christ, the father of the just man, who by taking on our nature stands mourning; for as the Apostle says, he was *offering with a strong cry and with tears* [Heb 5.7]. His faithful, as he feeds them with word and example, find tears in the wilderness of the mind, because compunction of tears arises from compassion for our neighbours. So Job 30 says:

*I wept heretofore for him that was afflicted:*

*and my soul had compassion on the poor*. [Job 30.25]

Compunction of tears is called a ‘stream of fire’ because it cleanses and warms. There is a proverb, "He weeps warmly, who weeps from the heart." Because there was a great fire of love in the heart of Magdalene, she shed the hottest tears, and *she began to wash his feet with tears* [Lk 7.38].Truly her tears were a ‘swift stream of fire’, because they destroyed all her sins:

*Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much.* [cf. Lk 7.47]

9. ‘Swift’. So Job 3 says:

*Before I eat, I sigh; and as overflowing waters, so is my roaring.* [Job 3.24]

As a swift and violent river, the waters of a flood, washes away an obstacle; so the ‘roaring’, the groans and tears, of a penitent wash away all the obstacles of temptation. And as at the roaring of a lion all the beasts stop in their steps, so do all the demons at the groaning of a penitent. So in chapter 2:

*No man spoke to him a word: for they saw that his grief was very great*. [Job 2.13]

The ‘speaking’ of the demons is their tempting, which ceases when there is vehement sorrow in a penitent; First he must go forward, if afterwards he may eat; that is, have peace and sweetness of conscience.

This stream goes out from the face of Christ, coming to judgement, and to render to each according to his works. Then let a man call to mind how angry that terrible judge will be, so that *the powers of heaven shall be moved* [Lk 21.26], and *the pillars of heaven tremble* [cf. Job 26.11]; when, as Apocalypse 6 says, they will say to the mountains and rocks:

*Fall upon us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the*

*wrath of the Lamb*. [Apoc 6.16]

Formerly he was silent before his shearer and striker, his face smeared with spittle and swollen with blows, pale in death; but in judgement his face will be fierce, angry and unpitying. Who will then stand to see it? If, as Esther 15 says,

*when she saw the face of Assuerus, full of graces, she fell down and was almost in a swoon* [cf. Esth 15.17-18]

what will man do, when in the judgement he sees the face of the just Judge, so terrible and austere?

*When Assuerus had lifted up his countenance, and with burning eyes had shewn the wrath of his heart, the queen sunk down and her colour turned pale: and she rested her weary head upon her handmaid*. [Esth 15.10]

When someone considers all this carefully within himself, he is fear-struck and grief-stricken, and he is awash with tears. So the swift stream of fire goes out from the face of Christ. Isaiah says: *From thy face, O Lord, we have conceived and brought forth the spirit of salvation* [cf. Is 26.17-18], tearful compunction. May he deign to grant us this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] cf. AUGUSTINE, *Soliloquies* II,1; PL 32.885

[2] cf. BERNARD, *In vigila Nativitatis Domini, sermo* 1,5; PL 183.89

[3] RICHARD OF ST VICTOR, *De Trinitate* VI,14; PL 196.978

[4] AMBROSE, *Exposition of Luke*, II,19; PL 15.1640

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE NATIVITY OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

1. At that time: *The time was fulfilled for Elizabeth to give birth, and she brought forth a son* [Lk 1.57]. In this Gospel two things are noted: the birth of the Forerunner, and his naming.

[THE BIRTH OF THE FORERUNNER]

2. The birth of the Forerunner: *The time was fulfilled for Elizabeth*. Mary remained three months in the house of Zacharias, ministering to her kinswoman, until she should give birth; and "It is read in the book of the Just that the blessed Virgin was the first to pick up the new-born John."[1] *The time was fulfilled*: the word 'fulfil' is frequently used in Holy Scripture in connection with the birth, death or activity of good men, signifying that their life has the fulness of perfection. Thus:

*It came to pass that Mary's days were fulfilled that she should be delivered.* [Lk 2.6]

*Abraham died, being full of days.* [Gen 25.8]

On the contrary, the days of the wicked are empty and vacant. So, *The time was fulfilled for Elizabeth to give birth*. Zacharias, as Luke tells, went into the Lord's temple to offer incense, when Gabriel appeared to him and said, 'Elizabeth your wife will bear you a son' [cf. Lk 1.9,11,13]. What was told him in the month of September, when the solemn feast was celebrated which is called the 'Day of Expiation, or Propitiation', was fulfilled today. Let us see the moral significance of Zacharias ('remembrance of the Lord' or 'remembering the Lord') and Elizabeth ('the seventh of my God').

3. Elizabeth is the faithful soul, who is well-named 'seventh of my God' on account of three 'sevens' which belong to her especially: of gifts, petitions and blessings. The first 'seven' justifies, the second moves on from good to better, the third perfects. Alternatively, 'seven' refers to the sabbath (or 'rest'), in which God rested [cf. Ex 31.15,17]; since she rested from all servile work. "The soul of the just is the seat of wisdom."[2] *His place is in peace* [cf. Ps 75.3], that is, in the peaceful soul. Of this sabbath Isaiah 58 says:

*Thou shalt call the sabbath delightful, and the holy of the Lord glorious.* [Is 58.13]

‘Delightful’ suggests pleasurable experience; the ‘delights’ are those three ‘sevens’ mentioned above, with which the soul is fed, so as to make a delightful sabbath, fed with holiness of life and glory of conscience.

This Elizabeth conceives by Zacharias; so that the Psalm says:

*I remembered God, and was delighted,*

*and was exercised, and my spirit swooned away*. [Ps 76.4]

A woman conceives with pleasure, and the soul conceives in great delight, from the remembrance of the Lord. So the Psalm says:

*I have been delighted in the way of thy testimonies, as in all riches,* [Ps 118.14]

that is, ‘in the way of your martyrdoms’, your sufferings. The crown of thorns, the Cross, the nails, the lance and the other instruments of Christ’s Passion, are the delight of the just man, in which he takes more pleasure than in all the riches of this world, saying, *I remembered God, and was delighted*. Two things come from this delight, the exercise of works of charity, and a failure of self-confidence in spirit; or else the two things the Psalm mentions:

*My flesh* (my carnality) *and my heart* (the pride of my heart) *hath fainted away:*

*thou art the God of my heart, and God is my portion for ever*., [Ps 72.26]

from whom I may conceive and bear the child of eternal life.

Note that Elizabeth conceived in the seventh month, September, and gave birth in June. Even so, the soul conceives in the ‘seventh’ (the sabbath), that is, in stillness, by devotion of mind; and she bears her son, good work, in June, called ‘Siban’ in Hebrew, meaning ‘rightness of gift’. The gift of grace which she conceives in her mind, she brings forth in rightness of action.

4. *Now Elizabeth’s full time of being delivered was come; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and kinsfolk heard that the Lord had shewed his great mercy towards her; and the congratulated her*.[Lk 1.57-58]

The Gloss says, "The coming forth or birth of saints brings joy to many, because it is a common good. Saints are born for the common benefit. Justice is a common virtue, that is, for the common profit of all, and so in the birth of a just man signs of his future life are given beforehand, and the grace of the virtue which is to follow is shown in the prefiguring joy of the neighbours."

Morally. The 'neighbours' are the angels, the 'kinsfolk' are just men, who congratulate the soul on the birth of good works. So Gabriel said:

*And many shall rejoice in his nativity; for he shall be great before the lord and shall drink no wine nor strong drink.* [Lk 1.14]

Truly, many rejoice: Christ, angel and neighbour. Christ, because as Luke 15 says,

*When he hath found the sheep, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing.* [Lk 15.5]

The Gloss says, " The 'shoulders' of Christ are the arms of the Cross. There he carried my sins, on that neck of a noble gibbet he rested." The angel, because:

*I say to you, there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance.* [Lk 15.10]

The Gloss says, "The angels, being rational, rejoice that man is reconciled to them; which should motivate us to goodness of life, to do what is pleasing to them whose patronage we should desire, and to offend whom we should fear. The neighbour, as the Apostle says in II Corinthians 7:

*I rejoice because you were made sorrowful unto penance.* [2Cor 7.9]

*He will be great*. Note that 'great' is used in reference to mind, 'largeness' to the body. If your work be small in your own eyes, it will be great before God. *I must decrease, he must increase* [cf. Jn 3.30], he says. When you lessen yourself by humility, grace grows in you by virtue of soul. *Before the Lord*, not before men, who deceive and are deceived, who call evil good, and good evil. What a man is before God, that he is, and no more.[3] If you want to consecrate your good work to God, beware, lest you drink the wine of vainglory and the strong drink of unsuitable mirth. So the Lord says to Aaron, in Leviticus 10:

*You shall not drink wine nor anything that may make drunk, thou nor thy sons, when you enter into the tabernacle of the testimony, lest you die*. [Lev 10.9]

And Numbers 6:

*When a man or woman shall make a vow to be sanctified, and will consecrate themselves to the Lord, they shall abstain from wine and every thing that may make drunk*. [Num 6.2-3]

Whoever wants to consecrate his work to the Lord, and be received into the tabernacle of the heavenly Jerusalem, should beware the drunkenness of vainglory and foolish

mirth.

[HIS NAMING]

5. His naming: *And it came to pass that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child* [Lk 1.59]. The 'first day' is knowledge of our own frailty; the second, the remembrance of our wickedness; the third, bitter contrition for it; the fourth, shedding of tears; the fifth, self-accusation in confession; the sixth, prayer to God; the seventh, almsgiving to one's neighbour; the eighth, affliction of abstinence upon oneself. On this 'eighth day' the child is circumcised, for truly the virtue of abstinence circumcises both the heart, from evil consent, and the body, from unlawful pleasures of the senses. So 'to abstain' is, literally, 'to stand apart'. He 'stands apart' who neither in heart or body consents to illicit pleasure. So Genesis 19 says that the angels said to Lot:

*Do not stay in all the country about, but save thyself in the mountain, lest thou be also consumed*. [Gen 19.17]

'All the country' is heart and body, in which we should not stay at all, either by act, or even 'about', by consent. We should save ourselves far off in the mountain of heavenly conversation, lest we perish along with those who stay in or about that country.

There follows: *And they called him by his father's name Zachary* [Lk 1.59]. The Gloss says, "Those who call him by the name of his father represent those who, when the Lord makes known new gifts of grace, would prefer him to proclaim the accustomed commands of the old priesthood. They want to impose his father's name, because they would rather receive justice (which comes from law) than grace (which comes from faith)." Wicked kinsfolk and relatives do this very thing today, who want to impose on a usurer's son the name of his father: teaching him to imitate his father's malice, rapacity and usury.

But let us hear what his mother answers: *Not so. But he shall be called John* [Lk 1.60]. She learnt from the spirit of prophecy what she had not learnt from her husband. She could not ignore the foreteller who had prophesied Christ, just as he had been foretold by the angel to Zachary. John means 'grace of God', because he was the foreteller of grace, or the beginner of Baptism by which grace is ministered. The faithful soul wants her work to be called after grace, because she has it by grace and wants to keep it by grace; saying with the Apostle:

*By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace in me hath not been void.* [1Cor 15.10]

So John means 'he in whom is grace', for two reasons: that he keep it, and that he be kept by it, and so it will not be 'void' or futile. When a vessel preserves wine, it is also preserved by the wine against corruption. *Keep my commandments, and they will keep you* [cf. Prov 7.2], it says. So Apocalypse 3:

*Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon the whole world to try them that dwell upon the earth*. [Apoc 3.10]

He who keeps the word of patience, is kept; lest he utter a word of shame in time of temptation, or consent to sin. Or else, the ‘hour of temptation’ is the point of death, in which the devil tries by every means to tempt man and pervert his sense, because at that moment he will either gain him or lose him altogether. And he chiefly tempts him to loss of faith or despair, lest he trust or receive the sacraments of the Church, and place his hope in the divine mercy. But happy is he who is kept in that hour!

6. There follows: *And they said to her: There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name* [Lk 1.61]. The evil and perverse kindred are carnal appetites and irrational inclinations of the mind, wherein there is none that is called after grace, but rather after concupiscence and vanities. Neither the devils nor wicked men want our work to be called after grace, but rather after pride, lust and avarice. So in Ruth :

*The women* (soft and feeble folk) *said: This is that Noemi. But she said to them: Call me not Noemi (that is, beautiful), but call me Mara (that is, bitter), for the Almighty hath quite filled me with bitterness*. [Ruth 1.19-20]

They call her by the name of ‘beauty’ (which is skin-deep), not ‘penance’ which is in bitterness of heart, whereby the grace of the Almighty fills the soul so that it has no room for the pleasure of poisonous sweetness.

*And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called* [Lk 1.62]. The Gloss says, "Those who make signs to the father regarding the child’s name represent those who aim to construct the grace of faith only upon the testimony of the law." Because unbelief had taken away his speech and hearing, he was asked by signs.

*Gabriel said to him: Thou shalt be dumb and shalt not be able to speak until the day wherein these things come to pass*. [Lk 1.20]

*And demanding a writing table he wrote, saying: John is his name*. [Lk 1.63]

He asked either for a table to rest his hand on, or for a writer’s pen. It was as though he said, "We are not giving him a name; he has already received one from God. He has his name; we do not choose it, we acknowledge it."

*And they all wondered* [Lk 1.63] at the agreement between father and mother. Daniel 5 says that there was sent from God a hand, which wrote on the wall: Mane, Thecel, Phares; which means: he has numbered, he has weighed, he has divided [cf. Dan 5.24-28]. The hand is at the service of the whole body; it puts food in the mouth and does everything. This represents the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is given to the faithful as the means whereby they are fed, and whereby they act. This hand writes upon the

human heart these three things: that it number all its sins in confession, and afterwards weighs them in satisfaction, so that punishment is in proportion to guilt, which it altogether separates from itself, so that it may finally persevere in penitence. Behold the writing of grace! Whoever is such as this, *His name is John*. The grace of the Holy Spirit imposes and writes the name of grace, that all our works may be pleasing and 'graceful', being referred to the grace of him by whom it is given. To him be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON]

7. *Nephtali is a hart let loose, and giving words of beauty*. This text is from Genesis 49 [Gen 49.21]. Nephtali means 'widening', or 'he has widened me', and represents blessed John, whom the Lord widened with manifold grace and made rich. So Jeremiah 1 says to him:

*Before I formed thee in the womb, I knew thee.* [Jer 1.5]

In Luke 1, Gabriel said:

*Fear not, Zachary, for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John*. [Lk 1.13]

*And before thou camest out of the womb I sanctified thee.* [Jer 1.5]

So:

*Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit,* [Lk 1.41] and:

*the infant in her womb leapt for joy.* [Lk 1.44]

*I have made thee a prophet unto the nations.* [Jer 1.5]

So:

*What went you out to see? A prophet? Yea, I tell you, and more than a prophet.* [Mt 11.9]

He is called 'a hart let loose', rapid and fast-moving, leaping over thorny and pitted places, aiding his course with a spring. So blessed John swiftly leaped over the riches of the world (the 'thorny places') and the pleasures of the flesh (the 'pitted places'). So there is sung about him the hymn,

"E'en in thy childhood, 'mid the desert places,

Thou hadst a refuge from the city gainèd."[4]

He was there from the age of twelve. So Luke 1 says:

*The child grew and was strengthened in spirit* (growing in the grace of the Holy Spirit)

*and was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel*. [Lk 1.80]

And Matthew 3:

*John had his garment of camels' hair and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey*. [Mt 3.4]

The Gloss on John says, "Poor clothing and food are praised, their use is rebuked in the rich man" *who was clothed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day* [Lk 16.19]. If blessed John, sanctified in the womb (than whom, by the Lord's testimony, *a greater had not arisen among the sons of women* [cf. Mt 11.11]), afflicted himself with such rough clothing and poor food: what can we wretched sinners say, conceived in sin and full of vice as we are, who shun what is rough and seek out what is soft and sweet? As Isaiah 22 says, the Lord calls us

*to weeping and to mourning, to baldness and to girding with sack-cloth. And behold, joy and gladness, killing calves and slaying rams, eating flesh and drinking wine*. [Is 22.12-13]

weeping means contrition, mourning is shedding tears, baldness is putting away temporal things, and sack-cloth is afflicting the flesh. Blessed John calls us to these by the example of his life and by the word of his preaching; and so is said:

8. *Giving words of beauty*. Whence he said: *Do penance: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* [Mt 4.17]. And again: I am *a voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight his paths* [Lk 3.4]. These are 'words of beauty; penitence beautifies the soul, whence IV Kings 5 says that

*Naaman the leper went down and washed in the Jordan seven times, according to the word of Eliseus; and his flesh was restored, like the flesh of a little child, and he was made clean*. [4(2)Kg 5.14]

So the sinner, infected with the leprosy of sin, must 'go down' (humble himself) and wash himself in the Jordan ('river of judgement'), tearful penitence, seven times: that is, throughout all the time of his life, which passes through seven ages, or because a seven year penance is usually enjoined on a sinner, according to the words of 'Eliseus' (that is, John the Baptist): *Do penance*, etc. And so his soul is restored to the cleanness of Baptismal innocence, which he had already received as a little child.

And note that blessed John is called 'a voice'. A voice is air, a voice makes known the will of the mind. Blessed John had nothing of the earth, earthly, but was entirely of the air, because 'his conversation was in heaven' [cf. Phil 3.20]. Or he is called 'a voice', since because of his exceeding abstinence he was slender, announcing the will of Christ, who 'cried in the desert' (that is, on the Cross): *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit* [Lk 23.46]. Or, just as a voice comes before a word, so he went before the Son of God. So Job 38 says:

*Canst thou bring forth Lucifer in his time?* [Job 38.2]

Just as Lucifer, the morning star, announces the day, so blessed John announced to us the 'day' of eternal life, Jesus Christ. *He that shall come after me was made* (that is, is preferred) *before me* [Jn 1.15] in dignity. Blessed is he for ever. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

9. *Nephthali is a hart let loose*. Of him, Deuteronomy 33 says:

*Nephtali shall enjoy abundance, and shall be full of the blessings of the Lord; he shall possess the sea and the south*. [Dt 33.23]

Nephthali (meaning 'converted' or 'widened') is the penitent who is converted from his evil way and widened in good works. So in Genesis 28, the Lord said to Jacob:

*Thou shalt be spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south.* [Gen 28.14]

The west is the sunset of temporal things, the east is the eternal dawn, the north is the devil's suggestion and the south is fraternal charity. The penitent spreads himself to the first, to tread it down; to the second, to take hold of it; to the third, to resist it; to the fourth, to love. And note that it puts the west first, and then the east, because unless someone first puts forth their foot to tread down temporal things, he cannot put forth his hand to take hold of heavenly things. Temporal things must decline, so that afterwards eternal things may rise.

This Nephthali is filled with an abundance of grace on the way: *The vales shall abound with corn* [Ps 64.14], that is, humble minds with the gift of grace. And he will be full of the blessing of glory in his homeland: *Come, ye blessed of my Father*, etc. [Mt 25.34]. But meanwhile, while he is on the way he must first possess the 'sea' of bitter penance and the 'south' where the sun shines and gives heat, the light of wisdom with regard to the contemplation of God, and heat as regards love of neighbour. Thus, *Nephthali is a hart let loose*.

10. Natural History says that the hart directs its course by practice, being accustomed to

leap over thorny and pitted places. When it hears the barking of dogs, it makes its way down-wind, so that its scent is blown away. It hears keenly with pricked-up ears, but not when they are down. When it feels itself growing sick, it eats twigs of olive and recovers its health. When it incurs darkness in its eyes, it extracts a serpent with the breath of its nostrils from hidden caverns, and when it is pulled out it eats it; and in the heat of its poison it goes to a spring, where, as it drinks and immerses itself, it deposits the darkness and other superfluous matter. In the same way the penitent or just man directs his course by the practice of devotion, so that he may run well and unweariedly towards the prize of his heavenly calling. The Apostle says to Timothy: *Exercise thyself unto godliness* [1Tim 4.7]. So Natural History teaches that bees fly in the air as if exercising themselves, and then return to the hives to eat. There is ‘godliness’. Just men are ‘bees’ who exercise themselves in the ‘air’ of heavenly contemplation. Job say: *The bird is born to fly* [Job 5.7]. It is said: *I will fly and be at rest* [Ps 54.7]. After such exercise, they return to the ‘hives’ of their own conscience, and there feed on its sweetness in joy of spirit.

The penitent also grows accustomed (for "custom is second nature"[5]) to leap over (that is, despise) the thorny places of temporal riches and the pitted places of bodily pleasure, and is so called ‘a hart let loose’. "No-one gets to the top at once"[6], and so we must little by little get used to despising riches and pleasures. "Use is learned by use"[7], and the Philosopher[8] says, "They would abandon sin, if they would get into the habit of avoiding it." And again, "The shortest way to riches is by despising riches." And again, "I am great, and born to greater things that to be a slave to my body."

Again, when the penitent senses the ‘barking of dog’, the suggestions of the devil, he makes his way of his action ‘down-wind’. That is, in all his actions, inward and outward, he takes refuge in humility. Humility is a ‘following wind’, pride a ‘contrary wind’. We read:

*The wind was against them and they were labouring in rowing.* [cf. Mk 6.48]

‘Following’ is ‘in the footsteps of’. Mary, the humble penitent, stood behind at the Lord’s feet, and began to wash his feet with tears [cf. Lk 7.38]. Alternatively, ‘following’ is a reminder of the person who takes up his cross and follows the Crucified. Whoever thus makes his way ‘down-wind’, the devil cannot sniff out with his subtle malice.

Again, he hears keenly with ears pricked up. It is said:

*At the hearing of the ear they have obeyed me.* [Ps 17.45]

And in Isaiah 50:

*He wakeneth in the morning;*

*in the morning he wakeneth my ear, that I may hear him as a master.*

*The Lord God hath opened my ear, and I do not resist.*

*I have not gone back*. [Is 50.4-5]

The ear, which hears by drawing in sound, represents obedience. If it is ‘pricked up’ by humility, and ‘open’ by devotion, it will draw in sound; for it will hear the master, that is, Christ or his prelate. He will not contradict his words, and not turn his back on his will. And note that it says ‘in the morning’ twice, implying that obedience should be prompt and cheerful. The Bride says,

*Let us get up early to the vineyards*, [Cant 7.12]

meaning actions of obedience.

Again, when the hart (the penitent) feels himself growing sick, that is, weakened or burdened with temptations, he eats twigs of olive. The ‘olive’ is Christ’s humanity, from which for our sake he squeezed out his blood like olive oil, in the press of the Cross, and with it he soothed our wounds. The ‘twigs’ of this olive are the nails and the lance, the scourges and the crown of thorns, and the other circumstances of his Passion. When the penitent ‘eats’ these by faith and devotion, he receives strength against temptation. So Isaiah 25 says:

*Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress,*

*a refuge from the whirlwind, a shadow from the heat.* [Is 25.4]

The true penitent is poor in spirit and needy in things. Christ, *who was made obedient* to the Father*, even unto death* [Phil 2.8], is his strength against worldly prosperity, lest it make him proud; his strength against worldly adversity, lest it make him despair; his refuge from the whirlwind of the devil’s suggestions, lest they blow him away; and a shade against the heat of carnal desire, lest it burn him up.

Again, just as *the hart panteth after the fountains of water* [cf. Ps 41.2], so the penitent sinner pants after the fountain of confession. When he feels afflicted by blindness of soul, by the withdrawal of grace, He draws out the serpent of mortal sin from the dark recesses of his conscience, with the breath of his nostrils (contrition). It says in II Kings 22:

*There went up a smoke in his wrath* [cf. Ps 17.9], *from his nostrils.* [2Kg(Sm) 22.9]

The ‘nostrils’ of the penitent are his subtle judgements, whereby he distinguishes the scent of paradise and the stink of hell, and recognises the snares of the devil. From these nostrils there goes up a ‘smoke’ of tearful compunction in his wrath, for repentance regarding himself, against himself. So he devours the serpent drawn out, because he

avidly recollects in bitterness of soul his mortal sin and its least circumstances; and so he hastens to the fountain of confession, where he may drink the water of tears and by humility immerse himself in that fountain of confession, putting away all that is superfluous and harmful, and so growing young again.

11. And this is what follows: *Giving words of beauty*. This eloquence is unobstructed speech. Luke says that the Apostles:

*began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak.* [Ac 2.4]

That is, they spoke freely. ‘Words of beauty’ are words of confession, which the converted sinner should give freely, not beating about the bush and half-heartedly. Mark 7 says:

*The string of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke right.* [Mk 7.35]

Note that confession is called ‘beauty’, because it beautifies the leprous soul:

*Praise and beauty are before him.* [Ps 95.6]

This is the water of the Jordan, which cleanses Naaman the leper; the fountain of salvation, which drives out the darkness and canker from the hart: the virtue of confession, which beautifies the soul so that she is pleasing to her Spouse, and comes to his embrace. May he grant this, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

NOTES

[1] P.COMESTOR, *Historia scholastica, in Evangelia*, 3; PL 198.1538

[2] GREGORY, *In evangelia homilia*, 38,2; PL 76.1283

[3] THOMAS À KEMPIS attributes this saying to St. Francis; *Imitation of Christ*, III,50

[4] ROMAN BREVIARY, Lauds hymn for St John the Baptist.

[5] cf. CICERO, *Pro Milone*, I,1,3

[6] cf. JUVENAL, *Saturae*, II,83

[7] cf. OVID, *Remedia amoris*, 503

8 SENECA, *Epistolae* 29, 62 and 65

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## FESTIVAL SERMONS

## THE HOLY APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL

1. At that time: *The Lord said to Simon Peter: Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?* etc. In this Gospel three things are noted: blessed Peter's three-fold confession of love for the Lord, the three-fold commendation of the Church to him, and Peter's own passion.

[PETER'S THREE-FOLD CONFESSION OF LOVE FOR THE LORD]

2. The threefold confession: *Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?* The Gloss says, "Jesus asked what he already knew, that he might love the more. Peter said what he knew of himself, namely that he loved, but because he did not know how much others loved, he was silent as to whether he loved more than they. Behold, he teaches us not to speak rashly about what is hidden; and to avoid the previous danger of denying, he answered cautiously about himself." And note that Jesus asked him not once, but again and a third time; and the third time he heard that he was loved by Peter. To the three-fold denial there is returned a three-fold confession of love, lest the tongue do less service to love than to fear. First, as Matthew says:

*He denied before them all, saying: I know not what thou sayest.* [Mt 26.70]

Secondly:

*He denied with an oath; I know not the man.* [Mt 26.72]

Thirdly:

*He began to curse and swear that he knew not the man.* [Mt 26.74]

The first and second times, he confessed:

*Thou knowest that I love thee.* [Jn 21.15,16]

The third time, he said:

*Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.* [Jn 21.17]

The Gloss on Luke says, "He denied at mid-night; he repented at cock-crow; and after the Resurrection he confessed three times that he loved the one he had denied three times before day-light. He went astray in the darkness of forgetfulness, he recovered in remembering the hoped-for light, and he stood up straight after his stumbling, in the presence of that same true light."

3. Note that there are three things from which life or death proceed: the heart, the tongue and the hand. In the heart is consent to good or evil; in the tongue is the utterance of words; in the hand is the putting into action. If we have denied God in these three, then, by taking care to perform the things that are contrary to each, we shall confess him. He denies with the heart, who does not believe, or who consents to mortal sin. So Stephen, in Acts 7, says:

*This Moses whom they denied, saying: Who hath appointed thee prince and judge over us?* [Ac 7.35]

Moses (‘man from the waters’) is faith, which is nurtured in the waters of Baptism; or the grace of compunction. Faith, the first of the virtues, is as it were the prince; the grace of compunction is as it were judge, whereby the sinner judges himself and condemns what he has done wrong. They deny this Moses, and refuse to make him their prince and judge, who do not believe in the heart, or in their heart consent to mortal sin.

Then, he denies Christ with his tongue, who destroys truth with a lie, or who slanders his neighbour. So Peter says, in Acts 3:

*You denied the Just and Holy One before the face of Pilate, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you.* [Ac 3.13-14]

Pilate (‘mouth of the hammerer’) is lying and detraction, in whose presence they deny Christ, who hammer his truth with lies, and scatter charity to neighbour with detraction. Detraction is turning the good deeds of others into evil, or belittling them. Such people ask to be given a murderer, Barabbas the robber (that is, the devil), and for Christ to be crucified.

Again, he denies with his hand who does wicked works. As the Apostle says, *In their works they deny God* [Tit 1.16]. Those who in the darkness of sin deny Christ three times in these ways, should repent at ‘cock-crow’, the preaching of the divine word; so that in the light of repentance they may be able to confess him three times with blessed Peter: *I love, I love, I love*. I love with my heart by faith and devotion; I love with my tongue, by confessing the truth and edifying my neighbour; I love with my hand by purity of deed. Amen.

[THE THREE-FOLD COMMENDATION OF THE CHURCH TO HIM]

4. The commendation of the Church: *Feed my lambs* [Jn 21.15,16]. "Note that 'feed' is said three times, but not once 'shear' or 'milk'."[1] If you love me for my own sake, and not yourself for your own sake, *feed my lambs*, as mine and not yours. Seek my glory, not yours, in them; my gain, not yours, because love of God is proved in love of neighbour. Woe to the man who does not feed even once, but shears and milks three or four times. In Genesis 14, the king of Sodom (the devil) says to him:

*Give me the living souls, and the rest take to thyself;* [Gen 14.21]

that is, the wool and the milk, the hide and the meat, the tithes and the first-fruits. In Zechariah 11, the Lord curses such a shepherd (or rather, wolf), who feeds himself:

*O shepherd and idol, that forsake the flock:*

*the sword upon his arm and upon his right eye:*

*his arm shall quite wither away:*

*and his right eye shall be utterly darkened*. [Zech 11.17]

The shepherd who deserts the flock entrusted to him is an idol in the church, like Dagon before the ark of the Lord [1Kg(Sm) 5.2]. He keeps the image, not the reality. Why then does he keep his place? Truly he is an idol, whose has eyes for worldly vanities, so that he does not see the miseries of the poor. He has ears for the flatteries of his followers, so that he does not hear the cry of the poor. He has nostrils full of perfumes, like a woman, and he does not smell the scent of heaven or the stink of hell. He has hands for gathering money, and he does not touch the scars of Christ's wounds. He has feet for building strongholds and exacting tribute, and he does not walk in preaching the word of the Lord. There is no cry of praise or confession in his throat. What is there in common between the Church of Christ and this rotten idol? As Jeremiah says:

*What hath the chaff to do with the wheat?* [Jer 23.28]

*What concord hath Christ with Belial?* [2Cor 6.15]

The arm of this idol will be withered away by the sword, the divine judgement, so that he can do no good. His right eye, the knowledge of truth, will be darkened, lest he perceive the way of justice for himself or for others. These two things happen to the Church's pastors today, as a result of their sins. They lack the strength of good works, and have not the light of knowledge. And so, alas! *the wolf* (the devil) *scatters the sheep* [cf. Jn 10.12], and the robber (the heretic) seizes them. But the kind shepherd, *who lays down his life for his flock* [cf. Jn 10.15], has a care for it, because he has bought it at so dear a

price. He commends them to Peter, saying, *Feed my lambs*. Feed them with the word of holy preaching; feed them with the suffrage of devout prayer; feed them with the example of holy living.

5. And note that he commends the lambs twice, because they are more tender and weak, and the sheep only once. By this, we are given to understand that those who are more weak and tender in the Church must be all the more nourished and sustained, both with spiritual benefits and corporal. The Apostle says:

*Comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak.* [1Thess 5.14]

Genesis 2 says:

*God took Adam* (the prelate)

*and put him in the paradise of pleasure* (the Church),

*to work in it* (by works of mercy towards those subject to him)

*and to keep it* (by preaching the word), [Gen 2.15],

that with him he might receive the reward of the kingdom. Amen.

[PETER’S OWN PASSION]

6. Blessed Peter’s passion: *Amen, amen, I say to thee: When thou wast younger, thou didst gird thyself and didst walk where thou wouldst*. [Jn 21.18]. He predicted that he would suffer, just as he had predicted that he would deny. Strengthened by the Resurrection, he was now able to perform what he had promised unseasonably when weak. Now he did not fear the ending of this life, because, by rising, the Lord had given him the example of a second life. *But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands*, that is, you will be crucified; and he adds how this will come about*: and another shall gird thee*, namely Nero, with chains, *and lead thee whither thou wouldst not* [Jn 21. 18], that is, to death. He was led unwillingly towards the fear of death, but by accepting it he was led out of it. He did not wish to come to it, but by accepting it he overcame it, and left his weak feelings behind. No-one wants to die; that is so natural that even old age did not remove it from Peter. So even the Lord said: *Let this chalice pass from me* [Mt 26.39]. But however great the fear of death may be, the power of love overcomes it. If the fear of death were little or nothing, the glory of martyrdom would not be so great. *This he said, signifying by what death he should glorify God* [Jn 21.19], that is, by this death he showed how greatly God is to be worshipped and loved.

7. Morally. *When thou wast younger*. Regarding this, Proverbs 7 says:

*The harlot catching the young man, she kisseth him, and with an impudent face flattereth, saying: Come, let us be inebriated with the breasts, and let us enjoy the desired embraces. Immediately he followeth her as an ox led to be a victim, and as a lamb playing the wanton*. [Prov 7.10,13,18,22]

The harlot is the world or the flesh, which catches the young man (the spirit) by pleasure, kisses him by consent, and flatters him in the effect. *Come*, she says*, let us be inebriated with the breasts* of gluttony and lust, *and let us enjoy the desired embraces* by custom. And because it is not yet old, but ‘young’ (frivolous) and unstable, like a wanton heifer or lamb, the flesh follows its desires and gives in to them.

He says, then, *When thou wast younger, thou didst gird thyself and didst walk where thou wouldst*. There is something similar in Jeremiah 46:

*Egypt is like a fair and beautiful heifer:*

*there shall come from the north one that shall goad her*. [Jer 46.20]

And Hosea 4:

*Israel hath gone astray like a wanton heifer* [Hos 4.16]

And in chapter 10:

*Ephraim is a heifer taught to love to tread out corn, but I passed over the beauty of her neck.*

*I will ride upon Ephraim*. [Hos 10.11]

O captive liberty, to gird yourself with self-will, and walk wherever its impulse leads you! The ‘heifer’, green in age, is the ‘younger’, light and unstable, called ‘fair’ in pleasing herself, ‘beautiful’ in outward appearance, and yet ‘Egypt’ (darkness’) in conscience. From the north (the devil) shall come one that shall goad her, the impulse of self-will, which makes her wanton, and refuse obedience to God and her superior. She is like a heifer that is taken from the threshing-floor to the meadow or the manger, but being used to treading out the corn, cannot rest until she returns to the tread-mill. There are many who cannot rest unless they are labouring, and who say (as in Wisdom 5)

*We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction,*

*and have walked through hard ways* (that is, of self-will):

*but the way of the Lord we have not known*, [Wisd 5.7]

that is, obedience, by which he comes to us. St Gregory[2] says, "It is stupid to linger in the way, and be unwilling to finish the journey." But the kind Lord rides upon Ephraim, and treads down ‘the beauty of her neck’, the pride and vainglory of her heart, humbling her to be submissive and obedient.

8. So there follows: *But when thou shalt be old.* So Wisdom 4 says:

*Venerable old age is not that of long time, nor counted by the number of years: but the understanding of a man is grey hairs, and a spotless life is old age*. [Wisd 4.8-9]

An old man is forgetful of himself; whoever wants to be truly obedient must be an ‘old man’, forgetful of himself, that is, of his self-will. So Genesis 27 says:

*Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, and he could not see.* [Gen 27.1]

Isaac (‘laughter’) is the obedient man, who should cheerfully obey the will of the one who commands him, and forget his own. In this ‘old age’, the eyes grow dim and cannot see, that is, discern. So Bernard[3] says, "Perfect obedience, especially in a beginner, is ‘indiscreet’; that is, not making judgements about what is commanded, or why, but striving simply to carry out faithfully and humbly what the superior commands."

So there is added: *Thou shalt stretch forth thy hands* (to works of obedience), *and* another (your superior) *shall gird thee* (because you are now an old man, not younger as before, when *thou didst gird thyself and didst walk where thou wouldst* ). But now he will *lead thee whither thou wouldst not*, that you may say with Christ:

*Not as I will, but as thou wilt; Father, not my will but thine be done.* [cf. Mt 26.39,42]

And with David:

*I am become as a beast before thee.* [Ps 72.23]

Strike with the scourge, prick with the goad, urge on with spurs, load down with burdens, feed with rough food! These things are done to a beast, and *I am become as a beast before thee,* so that you may lead me where you will and do with me what you will, because *I am become as a beast before thee,* indeed, a dead man!

So there follows: *This he said, signifying by what death he should glorify God*. Genesis 25 is **concordant**:

*Abraham decaying, he died in a good old age, having lived a long time, and being full of days.* [Gen 25.8]

Note that he who wants to obey perfectly should lose three things: his own sense, his

own will and his own body. Abraham, who, being obedient to the Lord's command, and not knowing where he was going, and who went out from his land, his kindred and his father's house- he is the true obedient man, 'decaying' as to his own sense, so that he defers to the sense of his superior (however simple) rather than his own. He 'dies in a good old age' as to the mortification of his own will. He 'lives a long time' as to maturity and humiliation of body. If he has these qualities, his days will be full and not empty. The obedient man glorifies the Lord on earth by such a death, and so will glorify the Lord in heaven, who is blessed for ever Amen.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON ON THE HOLY APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL]

9. *Rejoice, O Zabulon, in thy going out; and Issachar in thy tabernacles.*

*They shall call the people to the mountain; there shall they sacrifice the victims of justice.*

*Who shall suck as milk the abundance of the sea*.

This text is from Deuteronomy 33 [Dt 33.18-19]. These two Patriarchs represent the two Princes of the Church, Peter and Paul. Zabulon (meaning 'habitation of fortitude') is blessed Peter, who after the coming of the Holy Spirit became the habitation such fortitude, that he who had once denied at the voice of a maidservant was afterwards not afraid of Nero's sword.

*By his word the heavens* (that is, the Apostles)*were established,*

*and all the power of them by the spirit of his mouth* [Ps 32.6]

And:

*I have established the pillars thereof.* [Ps 74.4]

Issachar (meaning 'man of reward') is blessed Paul, was truly a man of eternal reward, because he laboured for it more than all others [cf. 1Cor 15.10].

*He saw rest that it was good: and the land that it was excellent.*

*And he bowed his shoulder to carry:* [Gen 49.15]

the Gospel on his shoulder, the scourge on his back for the sake of the Gospel; and so he received his due reward.

*Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel; for if I do this thing willingly I have a reward.* [1Cor 9.16-17]

Job 31 says:

*Let he that judgeth write a book, that I may carry it on my shoulder*. [Job 31.35-36]

Jesus Christ, to whom the Father has given all judgement [cf. Jn 5.22], has written a book, the Gospel, which Paul, *a vessel of election, carried* on his shoulder *before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel* [cf. Ac 9.15], wherefore he *was beaten three times with rods, once stoned* [cf. 2Cor 11.25] for the name of Christ.

10. These two Apostles rejoiced today in the Passion: Peter in his 'going out' from the pain of the cross to the glory of beatitude; Paul in his 'tabernacles', going out from the tabernacle of his own body and entering the tabernacle of the heavenly mansion. Peter rejoiced in the cross, Paul in the sword, because they were sure of eternal recompense, to which, while they lived, they had called the peoples committed to them.

So there is added: *They shall call the people to the mountain*. Numbers 10 is **concordant**:

*The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Make thee two trumpets of beaten silver, wherewith thou mayest call together the multitude*. [Num 10.1-2]

These two Apostles are called 'silver trumpets' on account of their resounding preaching, and 'beaten' because of being struck in their Passion. Christ made these trumpets, that is, he chose them by grace, that with them he might call a multitude of peoples to the mountain of eternal life. And just as those former trumpets called to war, to feasting and to religious festival [cf. Num 10.9-10], so these called the peoples to war against sin. Peter said:

*Be sober and watch; because your adversary the devil*, etc. [1Pt 5.8]

Paul said:

*Taking the shield of faith, whereby you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one*. [Eph 6.16]

To the banquet of innocence and a holy way of life; whence Peter said:

*As newborn babes, desire the rational milk without guile, that thereby you may grow into salvation, if so be you have tasted that the Lord is sweet*. [1Pt 2.2-3]

And Paul:

*Let us feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.* [1Cor 5.8]

To the festival in the heavenly homeland; whence Peter said:

*You shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified; receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls*. [1Pt 1.8-9]

And Paul: *So run that you may obtain* [1Cor 9.24], and:

*Until we all meet unto a perfect man,*

*unto the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ.* [Eph 4.13]

And after those trumpets have called the peoples to those three things, let us hear what will do:

*They shall sacrifice the victims of justice*. They did that this day, sacrificing their bodies as victims of justice, just and holy, by martyrdom to the Lord.

11. And how sweet to them was the bitterness of today's Passion, is clear from what follows: *Who shall suck as milk the abundance of the sea*. Note that the tossing sea is fearful to behold and bitter to taste; on the contrary, milk is pleasant in colour and sweet to taste. The word 'suck' implies eagerness and delight. O love of Christ, that makes all bitter things sweet! The Passion of the Apostles was fearful to behold, and bitter; but the love of Christ made it pleasant and sweet, so that they might accept it eagerly and with delight, and afterwards rejoice with him for ever, who is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

12. *Rejoice, O Zabulon, in thy going out; and Issachar in thy tabernacles.* In these two Patriarchs, two loves are denoted, namely of God and of neighbour. Zabulon (meaning 'substance of the habitation') is the love of God. The 'habitation' is the human mind, and its 'substance' or wealth is the love of God, than which there is no greater wealth. So Proverbs 3 says:

*Blessed is the man that findeth wisdom, and is rich in prudence* (that is, the love of God).

*The purchasing thereof is better than the merchandise of silver:*

*and her fruit than the chiefest and purest gold*. [Prov 3.13-14]

This denotes the sweetness of contemplation, which arise from love of the Creator; it is more precious than any wealth, and all the things people desire cannot be compared to it. Alternatively, the love of God is called 'substance of the habitation' because it makes the mind it possesses to stand firmly and not fall. Woe to that habitation which lacks this

substance! The Psalm says:

*I stick fast in the mire of the deep, and thee is no sure standing.* [Ps 68.3]

The soft mire is the love of the flesh or of the world, and he who is fixed in it has not the love of God on which he may stand, and so he is swallowed up in the depths.

Issachar (meaning ‘my reward’) is the love of neighbour, and he offers his shoulder to bear his burdens; as the Apostle says:

*Bear ye one another’s burdens; and so you shall fulfil the law of Christ,* [Gal 6.2]

which is charity. The love of neighbour is called a ‘strong ass’, because he bears his burdens along the way, so as to receive a reward in heaven. So the Psalm says:

*When he shall give sleep to his beloved: behold, the inheritance of the Lord are children;*

*the reward, the fruit of the womb*. [Ps 126.2-3]

Sleep is sweet after labour. ‘Beloved’ are those we are doubly bound to. So when he gives sleep (that is, rest) after labour to his beloved, to those bound by the chains of the two-fold love, that is the inheritance of the Lord! In that sleep there is the possession of the eternal homeland, the reward of the children adopted by grace, the fruit of Mother Church’s womb. Alternatively, the ‘beloved’ are the Lord’s inheritance, and the children are the reward of Jesus Christ, given to him by the Father as the reward of his Passion, he being the fruit of a virginal womb: *Blessed is the fruit of thy womb* [Lk 1.42].

13. Zabulon, then, the love of God, rejoices in his going out, which denotes the contemplative life. He who wishes to make progress in it should go out not only from the world but also from care for himself, that is, he must go out from himself. So Genesis 18 says:

*Abraham ran to meet the Lord from the door of the tent, and adored down to the ground. And he said, Lord, if I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away from thy servant*. [Gen 18.2-3]

The tabernacle is the military service of the active life. A man goes out from it "and runs to meet the Lord, when he is prompt to suspend himself in contemplation, and contemplates the light of the supreme wisdom in joy of mind, taken beyond himself in excess of mind."[4] So that he may longer stay in this state, he asks him that it may not pass away. Let Zabulon rejoice in his going out, then, and let Issachar, too, (that is, love of neighbour) rejoice in his tabernacles; that is, in the military service of the active life, in which he labours for his neighbour’s need.

Of these tabernacles, Numbers 24 says:

*How beautiful are thy tabernacles, O Jacob, and thy tents, O Israel! As woody valleys, as watered gardens near the rivers, as tabernacles which the Lord hath pitched, as cedars by the waterside*. [Num 24.5-6]

This text elegantly describes the disposition of the man who desires to follow the active life. Jacob (‘the one who wrestles’), who is also Israel (‘he who sees God’), is the active man. "Now he is wrestling, now he is hopeful in mind; that is, in the embrace of Lia (‘laborious’), and in the embrace of Rachel (‘beginning of sight’)."[5] The tabernacles or tents are the military service of his holy way of life; they are, and should be, ‘beautiful’ in moral probity, ‘as woody valleys’ in humility of mind, offering a shade against the impulse of the flesh, ‘as watered gardens near the rivers’ in abundance of tears, ‘as tabernacles which the Lord hath pitched’ in constancy of mind and final perseverance, ‘as cedars’ in height of hope, and odour of good repute which repels the serpents of detraction, and ‘by the waters’ of charisms of grace. He who has such tabernacles may well rejoice and delight in them.

14. There follows: *They shall call the people to the mountain.* Note that there is both an ‘inner’ and an ‘outer’ man, and each has its ‘people’. The inner man has a population of many thoughts and inclinations; the outer man has a population of bodily members and senses.

The love of God calls the people of the inner man to the mountain, that is, to the excellence of holy contemplation, so as to gather them there to that banquet of which Isaiah 25 speaks:

*The Lord of hosts shall make unto all people, in this mountain, a feast of fat things full of marrow, of wine purified from the lees*. [Is 25.6]

When the mind is lifted up in contemplation, the people is gathered on the mountain, because thoughts are restrained from inappropriate wandering, and inclinations are restrained from unlawful desires. Then the Lord makes them a feast (that is, joy) of fat things full of marrow (in the light of inner wisdom which enriches the conscience). As it is said:

*With the voice of joy and praise: the noise of one feasting.* [Ps 41.5]

As a well fattened animal is happy and playful, so the soul which enjoys that taste exults and dances. The banquet (or joy) of purified wine is the shedding of tears. This double joy is in affection and understanding, that is, in love and in knowledge.

Again, the love of neighbour calls the people of the outer man to the mountain, that is, to the height of fraternal charity, so that the bodily members and senses serve the neighbour and minister to his needs. So Haggai 1 says:

*Go up to the mountains, bring timber and build the house: and it shall be acceptable to me and I shall be glorified, saith the Lord*. [Hag 1.8]

He goes up the mountain, who loves his neighbour. He brings the wood, when he supports him. He builds him a house, when he ministers to his needs.

15. There follows: *There shall they sacrifice the victims of justice.* As it is said: *Offer up the sacrifice of justice* [Ps 4.6]. The love of God sacrifices a victim in 'a spirit of humility and a contrite heart' [cf. Dan 3.39]; the love of neighbour, in bodily affliction and labour. These victims are called 'of justice', because they are made solely with a view to charity. Truly they are 'victims of justice', not of vainglory, of which Hosea 5 says: *You have turned aside victims into the depths* [Hos 5.2]. That is what they do, who shed tears, or perform works of fraternal need, for vainglory.

There follows: *Who shall suck as milk the abundance of the sea.* Whoever wishes to suck must compress his lips. No one can suck something with his mouth wide open. To suck is to take something in. He who wants to suck 'the abundance of the sea' (the temptations of the flesh, the world and the devil) 'as milk' (that is, sweetly), must compress his lips against the vanity of the world. Then that two-fold love will suck temptations as milk, because it will not take in any alien love. So the Canticle of Moses says:

*They sucked honey out of the rock, and oil out of the hardest stone.* [Dt 32.13]

The 'rock' stands for the hardness of carnal or worldly temptation; the 'hardest stone' is the suggestion of the unyielding devil. Happy are they who from both the one and the other know how to suck sweetness and the light of a happy conscience! Job says: *The rock poured me out rivers of oil* [Job 29.6]. This comes about when someone is sorely tempted, and is visited in that temptation by grace, and enlightened, and watered with flowing tears. May he water us with these, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

[ALLEGORICAL SERMON ON SAINT PAUL]

16. *Who hath sent out the wild ass free, and who hath loosed his bonds?*

*To whom I have given a house in the wilderness, and his dwelling in the barren land.*

*He scorneth the multitude of the city, he heareth not the cry of the driver.*

*He looketh round about the mountains of his pastures,*

*and seeketh for every green thing*.

This text comes from Job 39 [Job 39.5-8]. The wild ass, or onager ('field-ass') represents blessed Paul, who was as it were the ass of that field which is the Church. A 'field' is someone's area of work, where they sow, or plant trees, or put to pasture, or decorate with flowers. Blessed Paul did all these four things in the field of the Church. He sowed the seed of the divine word. he grafted the shoots of holy life upon the unfruitful trees, to renew them and make them bear fruit; or (as Ecclesiastes says*) he planted trees of all kinds* [Eccles 2.5], namely just men. He tended the pastures of eternal life, and decorated it with flowers of various virtues. He was, then, the 'ass' of this field, because in it he *bore the burden of the day and the heats* [cf. Mt 20.12]. As he said:

*In many more labours, in prisons more frequently, in stripes above measure, in deaths often*, etc. [2Cor 11.23], *besides those things that are without; my daily instance, the solicitude for all the churches*. [2Cor 11.28]

Who has sent out this wild ass free? He, surely, who 'set him apart from his mother's womb' (the Synagogue, by whose laws and ceremonies he had been bound) and *called him by his grace* [Gal 1.15]; and so set him free. So he says:

*Am not I free? Am not I an Apostle? Have not I seen Jesus Christ our Lord?* [1Cor 9.1]

Truly he was free, who could say: *I am not conscious to myself of anything* [1Cor 4.4].

*Or who hath loosed his bonds?* Surely Christ, of whom he said: *I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ* [Phil 1.23]. He set him free in his conversion, that he might run to preach the word. In his Passion today, he loosed the bonds of his body, that he might fly to heaven.

17. There follows: *To whom I have given a house in the wilderness, and his dwelling in the barren land*. This is what he himself said:

*He who wrought in Peter the apostleship of the circumcised wrought in me also among the Gentiles,* [Gal 2.8]

who are called 'a wilderness', because God does not dwell in them, and 'a barren land' of bitterness and sterility. God gave blessed Paul a house among them, that is, he gave him to build a house among them, the holy Church, and the tent-dwelling of holy warfare, so that he might fight for them against visible and invisible enemies, and defend the house committed to him.

There follows: *He scorneth the multitude of the city* (of Rome), in which he was beheaded today; so that he might say with Job 31:

*If I have been afraid at a very great multitude,*

*and the contempt of kinsmen hath terrified me.* [Job 31.34]

(The ‘kinsmen’ are the Jews). Another translation puts it more clearly:

*Nor was I ashamed before a multitude of people, that I would not confess before them*.

Truly, this is what blessed Paul did; so that he says to Timothy:

*In the Gospel I am appointed a preacher and an apostle and teacher of the Gentiles. For which cause, I also suffer these things; but I am not ashamed*. [2Tim 1.11-12]

*He heareth not the cry of the driver*, namely Nero, fearing not his sword; for, as he himself says, *No creature can separate from the charity of Christ* [cf. Rom 8.39].

So there is added: *He looketh round about the mountains of his pastures*, which stand for the charity of Christ. He says: *I shew unto you yet a more excellent way* [1Cor 12.31]. There are his pastures, his refreshment and satisfaction. He looks around them, scorns the multitude and does not hear the cry of the driver. Alternatively, the ‘mountains of pastures’ are the angelic orders, to which, *whether in the body or out of the body, God knoweth, he was caught up; and heard words which it is not granted to man to utter* [cf. 2Cor 12.3-4]. There he fed, there he rejoiced, because there was his pasture, the contemplation and refreshment belonging to him.

*And he seeketh for every green thing*. Though still in mortal flesh, he looked about the mountains of the heavenly pasture, in contemplation of mind, carefully and (if it is right o say so) continually. Now, truly, he ‘seeks every green thing’, meaning the joy of eternal satisfaction, which satisfies his every desire. He who seeks, desires. Such is the great beauty of the divine majesty, which inflames those blessed spirits with its desire, and by inflaming refreshes, and by refreshing makes to desire! To him be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

[MORAL SERMON]

18. *Who hath sent out the wild ass free?* He, surely, of whom Moses says in Deuteronomy 6:

*When thy son shall ask thee tomorrow, saying: What mean these testimonies, and ceremonies, and judgements? Thou shalt say to him: We were bondmen of Pharao in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand; that he might bring us in and give us the land [Dt 6.20-21,23*]*, flowing with milk and honey*. [Dt 26.9]

*Whoever committeth sin is the servant of sin* [Jn 8.34]; and Peter says:

*By whom a man is overcome, of the same also is he the slave.* [2Pt 2.19]

From this slavery, he sends forth the wild ass free, who says in Isaiah 43:

*I am, I am he that blot out thy iniquities for my own sake; and I will not remember thy sins.* [Is 43.25]

And the last chapter of Micah:

*He will put away our iniquities, and he will cast our sins into the bottom of the sea.* [Mic 7.19]

The 'wild ass' is the spirit of the penitent who (as is said in the last chapter of Proverbs) *hath considered a field, and bought it* [Prov 31.16]. The 'field' is the heavenly homeland which is worked continually, because God is unceasingly praised there. As it is said: *They shall praise thee for ever and ever* [Ps 83.5]. She considers this field in contemplation of mind, she buys it in satisfaction of penance, and she is called 'ass of the field'. He sends her forth free, when with Magdalene she hears the words: *Thy sins are forgiven thee* [Lk 5.23].

*Or who hath loosed his bonds?* Surely that Jacob mentioned in the penultimate chapter of Genesis:

*The bands of Joseph's arms and hands were loosed,*

*by the hands of the mighty one of Jacob.* [Gen 49.24]

The 'bands' are the evil habits and desires of the world, which bind the arms and hands so that they cannot perform good works, as Solomon counsels in Ecclesiastes 9:

*Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly: for neither work, nor reason, nor wisdom, nor knowledge, shall be in hell, whither thou art hastening*. [Eccles 9.10]

You hasten and urge yourself on by mortal sin. But those bands are loosened by the hand of mighty one of Jacob, that is, the mercy of the mighty God, who rescued Jacob (the spirit) from the hand (the power) of his brother Esau (the flesh or the world). Judges 16 is **concordant**:

*Samson broke the bands, as a man would break a twisted thread of tow, when it smelleth the fire.* [Jg 16.9]

The fire is the grace of the Holy Spirit, and at its smell (its inspiration) the bands of evil habit are broken, with which Samson was bound by Delilah, that is, the spirit by carnal desire.

Thus freed, let us hear what the Lord will do: *To him I have given a house in the wilderness*. So Jeremiah says:

*From the presence of the hand of the Lord I sat alone,*

*because thou hast filled me with bitterness.* [cf. Jer 15.17]

And Lamentations 3:

*He shall sit solitary and hold his peace: because he hath lifted himself up above himself;*

*he shall put his mouth in the dust.* [Lam 3.28-29]

Five things are mentioned in this text, which are necessary for any just man:

peace of heart (where it says, *He shall sit*),

separation from earthly things (where it says, *solitary*),

silence of the mouth (*he will hold his peace*),

lifting up in contemplation (*he hath lifted himself up above himself*),

remembrance of his own frailty (adding: *he shall put his mouth in the dust*).

He remembers what was said, and says to himself: *Thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return*.

19. There follows: *And his dwelling in the barren land*. The barren land is this world; whence the Psalm says:

*He hath turned a fruitful land into barrenness,*

*for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.* [Ps 106.33-34]

As it says in the Apocalypse: *Woe to the inhabitants of the earth* [cf. Apoc 8.13]. In this land the Lord gives the wild ass (the spirit) a tent-dwelling, his bodily members, so that in them and from them he may fight the devil and sin. "It is a skilfully fighting enemy that makes you a skilful fighter."[6] So the Apostle says:

*I so fight, not as one beating the air* (the spirits of the air, but not only them),

*but I chastise my body and bring it into subjection.* [1Cor 9.26-27]

So Genesis 12 says: *Abraham pitched his tent between Bethel* (meaning 'the house of God') *and Hai* ('the question of life') [cf. Gen 12.8]. To 'pitch one's tent' is to exercise one's body in the satisfaction of penance, and spread it out to works of charity. This, between the 'house of God', eternal life, by directing the eye of one's entire intention there; and the 'question' which is the temptation of this life, so as to fight it, and by fighting overcome it in strength of mind. In the school of this wretched life, various are the 'questions' of temptation. Who is so skilled as to confute them all? There are as many questions as there are temptations. We cannot answer them more wisely, than by despising them. So there follows: *He scorneth the multitude of the city.*

NOTES

[1] cf. Abbot GAUFRIDUS, *Declamationes*, 11,12; PL 184.444

[2] cf. GREGORY, *Moralia*, XX,15,40; PL 76.160-1

[3] GUIGO THE CARTHUSIAN, *Epistola ad fratres de Monte Dei*, I,5,14; PL 184.317

[4] cf. RICHARD OF ST VICTOR, *Beniamin maior*, IV, 11; PL 196.147

[5] cf. RICHARD OF ST VICTOR, *Beniamin minor*, 2-4; PL 196.2-4

[6] OVID, *Ponticae*, II,3,53

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# THE SERMONS OF ST ANTONY

*Translated by Paul Spilsbury*

## APPENDIX

[In his biography of St Antony, Fr Leopold de Chérancé gives a sermon which the Saint is said to have delivered in 1226, in the Benedictine abbey of St Martin at Limoges. His authority is the Chronicle of Pierre Coral, Abbot of St Martin, Librairie Nationale MS n. 5,452, fol. cix. This sermon does not seem to correspond to any of those contained in the *Sermones Dominicales et Festivi*. As it is not readily available, I reproduce it in the English translation of Fr Marianus, O.S.F.C.[1] I have given the scriptural references, and conformed the lay-out to the rest of this translation. If authentic, this seems to be the only record of a sermon as actually preached by the Saint.]

### A SERMON PREACHED AT THE ABBEY OF ST MARTIN, LIMOGES

*Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest!* [Ps 54.7]

Such is the cry of a soul that is weary of this world and longs for the solitude and peace of the cloister life. It is of the religious life that the Prophet Jeremias spoke when he said:

*Leave the cities, ye that dwell in Moab, and dwell in the rock;*

*and be ye like the dove that maketh her nest in the mouth of the hole in the highest place*. [Jer 48.28]

*Leave the cities*, that is, the sins and vices which dishonour, the tumult which prevents the soul from raising herself to God, and, often, even from thinking of him. *Leave the cities*, for it is written:

*I have seen iniquity and contradiction in the city.*

*Day and night shall iniquity surround it upon its walls;*

*and in the midst thereof are labour and injustice.*

*And usury and deceits have not departed from its streets*. [Ps 54.10-12]

There is to be found iniquity against God and man; contradiction against the preacher of truth; labour in the ambitious cares of the world; injustice in its dealings; knavery and

usury in its business transactions.

*Ye that dwell in Moab*, that is in the world which is seated in pride as the city of Moab. All is pride in the world: pride of the intellect, which refuses to humble itself before God; pride of the will, which refuses to submit to the will of God; pride of the senses, which rebel against reason and dominate it… But to leave the world, live remote from the tumult of cities, to keep oneself unspotted from their vices, is not sufficient for the religious soul.

Hence the Prophet adds: *Dwell in the rock*. Now this rock is Jesus Christ. Establish yourself in him; let him be the constant theme of your thoughts, the object of your affections. Jacob reposed upon a stone in the wilderness, and while he slept he saw the heavens opened and conversed with angels, receiving a blessing from the Lord [cf. Gen 28.11-16]. Thus will it be with those who place their entire trust in Jesus Christ. They will be favoured with heavenly visions; they will live in the company of angels, they will be blessed as Jacob was, *to the north and south, to the east and west* [Gen 28.14]. To the north, which is the divine breath mortifying the flesh with its concupiscences; to the east, which is the light of faith and the merit of good works; to the south, which is the full meridian splendour of wisdom and charity; to the west, which is the burial of the old man with his vices. But as to the soul which does not repose upon this rock, it cannot expect to be blessed by the Lord.

*And be ye like the dove that maketh her nest in the mouth of the hole of the highest place*.

If Jesus Christ is the rock, the hole of the rock, in which the religious soul is to seek shelter and take up her abode, is the wound in the side of Jesus Christ. This is the safe harbour of refuge, to which the Divine Spouse calls the religious soul when he speaks to her in the words of the Canticle:

*Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come, O my dove,*

*that art in the clefts of the rock. in the deep hollow of the wall*. [Cant 2.13-14]

The Divine Spouse speaks of the numberless clefts of the rock, but he also speaks of the deep hollow. There were, indeed, in his body numberless wounds, and one deep wound in his side; this leads to his heart, and it is hither he calls the soul he has espoused. To her he extends his arms, to her he opens wide his sacred hide and divine heart, that she may come and hide therein. By retiring into the clefts of the rock the dove is safe from the pursuit of birds of prey, and, at the same time, she prepares for herself a quiet refuge where she may calmly repose and coo in peace. So the religious soul finds in the heart of Jesus a secure refuge against the wiles and attacks of Satan, and a delightful retreat. But we must not rest merely at the entrance to the hole in the rock, we must penetrate its depths. At the mouth of the deep hollow, at the mouth of the wound in his side we shall, indeed, find the precious blood which has redeemed us. This blood

pleads for us and demands mercy for us. But the religious soul must not stay at the entrance. When she has heard, and understood, the voice of the divine blood, she must hasten to the very source from which it springs, into the very innermost sanctuary of the heart of Jesus. There she will find light, peace, and ineffable consolations.

*And be ye like the dove that maketh her nest in the deep hollow of the rock.* The dove builds her nest with little pieces of straw she gathers up here and there. And how are we to build an abode in the heart of Jesus? This Divine Saviour, who so mercifully gives us the place wherein we are to make our abode, furnishes us at the same time with the materials with which to construct it. O religious soul, dove beloved of Christ, behold those little pieces of straw which the world tramples under its feet. They are the virtues practised by thy Saviour and thy Spouse, of which he himself has set thee an example: humility, meekness, poverty, penance, patience and mortification. The world despises them as useless pieces of straw; nevertheless, they will be for thee the material wherewith to construct thy dwelling-place, for ever, *in the profound hollow of the rock*, in the heart of Jesus.

NOTES

1 *St. Anthony of Padua*, by Father Leopold de Chérancé, O.S.F.C., rendered into English by Father Marianus, O.S.F.C. with an introduction by Father Anselm, O.S.F.C. (Eighth Edition, London, Burns Oates & Washbourne), 83-86.